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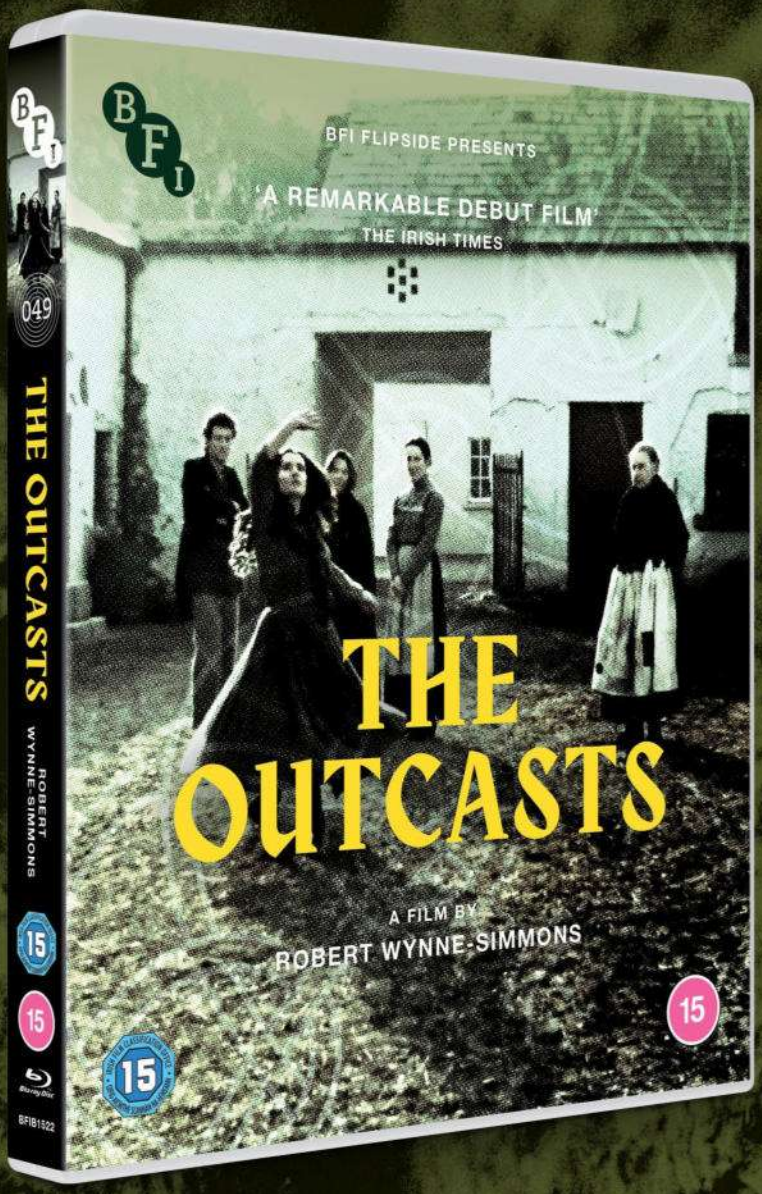
THE IRISH TIMES



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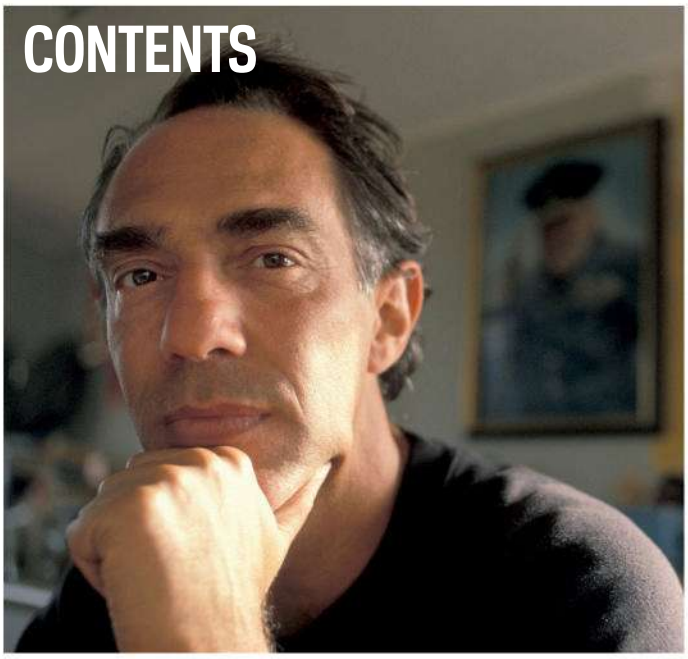

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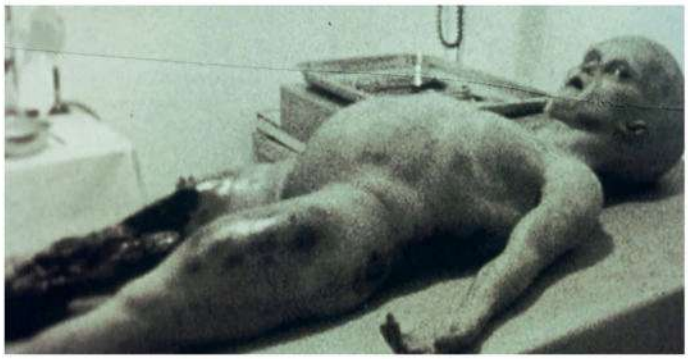

CHRIS HARRIS ©HOUSE STARVE ACRE LTD

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ETIENNE GILFILLAN

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ANDY KAY

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EDITORIAL

CAPUCINE DESLOUIS

THE WOMAN IN WHITE (OR GREY)

With the change of season and the advent of autumn mists, our thoughts turn, naturally enough, to ghosts and ghostlore.

Alan Murdie has recently edited a new edition of Andrew Green's 1977 classic *Phantom Ladies*, a guide to British hauntings associated with female ghosts, and in this month's cover story takes a fresh look at this most widely reported variety of British spook. But, as Alan points out, the continued ubiquity of phantom ladies across the British Isles and beyond can sometimes obscure some of the problems associated with investigating them: establishing identities for these apparitions can be extremely difficult, even when they are linked, as they are in popular imagination and tradition, to historical figures and specific places. But does the existence of such strong traditions mean accounts of spectral women in white should be relegated to the realm of folklore? Should we simply dismiss contemporary witness testimony and first-hand accounts of encounters with phantom ladies? What about, for example, the White Lady sometimes seen shimmering at a bus stop, of all things, near Lord Byron's one-time residence of Newstead Abbey? (See this month's 'Ghostwatch' column for more).

Rebecca Batley looks at another subset of the classic female phantom, Grey Lady ghosts, finding that many of the traditions around them are just that: bodies of ghostlore that have grown up, sometimes over a long period, around famous females assumed to have returned from the grave – or what Alan Murdie refers to as "deceased celebrity culture".

Speaking of which, Kate Cherrell documents a particularly modern, and strikingly cheesy, example of the phenomenon as she revisits the 'pay-per-view séance', a long-forgotten 2003 venture in which TV psychics supposedly made contact with the 'residual energies' of 'the People's Princess'. And after that they came for John Lennon.

BOOKAZINES & GIVEAWAYS

If this issue doesn't satisfy all your ghostly needs, then fear not – *Poltergeist!*, a new collection of classic articles from the FT archives goes on sale this month. With articles covering disturbing, destructive and sometimes dangerous hauntings from Enfield and South Shields to 19th century Canada and contemporary Turkey, and new analysis and commentary from the tireless Alan Murdie, this makes perfect reading – or a perfect gift – for Hallowe'en; so order your copy today! See p.41 for further details.

ETIENNE GILFILLAN / ANDY KAY

Also, thanks to the generosity of the good folks at Flying Disk Press, we are giving away five sets of fortean books in this month's competition – see opposite for details.

ERRATA

FT445:45: Richard Paul Jones spotted a mistake in Jan Bondeson's article about medical curiosities in old cartes de visite: The human colossus Daniel Lambert weighed 52 stone at his death, which is 335kg – not 24kg, as was stated in the article.

FT446:51: Tom Ruffles noted an error in Eric Hoffman's review of two books about William James in which one of Leonora Piper's spirit controls is referred to as 'Dr Phineas'. "This was actually Dr Phinuit," writes Tom. "Hoffman is possibly thinking of Pheneas, who communicated with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's family circle."

COMPETITION

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THE MEADOW PROJECT

EXPLORATIONS INTO THE SOUTH'S SKINWALKER RANCH

TREY HUDSON

Several hotspots of high strangeness have emerged over the decades: Norway's Hessdalen Valley, Romania's Hoia-Baciu Forest and the USA's legendary Skinwalker Ranch. This book presents in-depth research into another such location, a remote site known simply as the "Meadow". It has attracted reports of UFOs, cryptid beasts, portals, missing time, crop circle formations, Men in Black, strange beams of light, mysterious beings and other oddities. The Meadow Project will take you on the amazing journey from the site's discovery to the most recent investigations. It's an amazing story that deserves to be told.

BEYOND REASONABLE DOUBT

THE PASCAGOULA ALIEN ABDUCTION

PHILIP MANTLE & IRENA McCAMMON SCOTT

On 11 October 1973, two Mississippi shipyard workers decided to go fishing on the Pascagoula River after work – a decision that changed their lives forever. Charles Hickson and Calvin Parker watched as a dazzling light appeared, a strange object descended and three bizarre looking humanoid entities emerged and glided towards them... The Pascagoula abduction remains one of the strangest and best documented on record, and this book – containing new discoveries, exclusive interviews with Calvin Parker and eyewitness testimony from independent sources – is the definitive account of the case.

THE POLYCHRONICON OF MERLIN, JOSEPH & ARTHUR

MARK OLLY

Imagine the most popular heroic story ever written, one which spans three millennia and goes to the very heart of the largest religion in the world, but which has been ignored by archæologists and has devolved into myth: the tales of King Arthur and his Knights of The Round Table. What if everything you thought you knew about Arthur was invented by an invading foreign power unsympathetic to the truth and seeking to subvert and overthrow an ancient regime? Here at last is what survives of that ancient truth, focusing on the mythology of Merlin, Joseph of Arimathea, and Arthur and reconstructing the lost history of the Dark Ages from source materials written at the time.

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A DIGEST OF THE WORLDWIDE WEIRD

STRANGE DAYS

SHROUDED IN MYSTERY

New research suggests relic may date from time of Christ after all

Ever since the Turin Shroud first appeared in the historical record in 1354, when it was displayed as the authentic burial shroud of Jesus at the new collegiate church in Lirey, north-central France, it has attracted controversy. The Shroud was already being denounced as a forgery by the bishop of Troyes, Pierre d'Arcis, in 1389, and the argument has been going on ever since. Any hope that science might resolve the issue has proved optimistic. In 1898 it was found that the image on the Shroud seems to be some sort of photographic negative of a 3D object, such as a body, and a 2015 analysis of pollen found in the weave of the Shroud obtained results consistent with an origin in the Holy Land. However, in 1978 an analysis that involved removing surface material with sticky tape concluded that the image had been painted with red ochre and vermillion in a gelatin medium, while in 1988 radiocarbon dating placed the manufacture of the fabric of the Shroud at sometime between AD 1260 and 1390, roughly contemporary with the first time it was displayed. So, the jury remains out, even after nearly 700 years of scrutiny and argument.

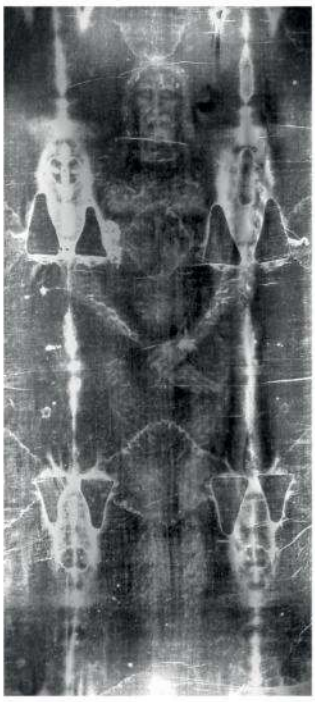
Now, the scientific pendulum seems to have swung towards confirming that the Shroud really did originate in the Holy Land in Biblical times and did once cover an injured corpse. This year, a team at Italy's National Research Council Institute of Crystallography conducted a study of the relic using wide-angle X-ray scattering (WAXS). WAXS measures the natural ageing of cellulose in the flax out of which the Shroud is woven

REALY EASY STAR / TONI SPAGONE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: The most recent of the original Shroud's public appearance was in Turin in 2015. **BELOW:** A full-length negative photograph of the Shroud in which the figure usually interpeted as the crucfied Christ is more easily visible.

Fanti also claims to have found anomalous radiation traces in the sample

and uses this to calculate how much time has passed since the fabric's manufacture. Researchers subjected eight small samples of flax from the Shroud to WAXS and were able to discern tiny details of the linen's structure and cellulose patterns. They then applied specific ageing parameters such as temperature and humidity, which allowed them to work out that the object had most likely been kept in temperatures of about 72.5 degrees Fahrenheit



(33.5°C) and a relative humidity of around 55 per cent for about 13 centuries before it arrived in Europe, consistent with conditions in the Holy Land. They also compared the pattern of cellulose breakdown in the Shroud with other linens found in Israel that date back to the first century, including a linen sample found at Masada known to date from AD 55-74. They found that "The data profiles were fully compatible", and so the two pieces of material were likely to have been woven at roughly the same time and in the same part of the world. Conversely, they found that there was no match between the Shroud fabric and linens manufactured between AD 1260 and 1390, refuting claims that it was of mediæval manufacture. The study's lead author, Dr Liberato De

MORE TUT TROUBLE

Ancient Egpyt's radioactive curses

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MEDICAL MATTERS

The worm that ate part of RFK Junior's brain

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FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Possessed clowns and jealous ghosts

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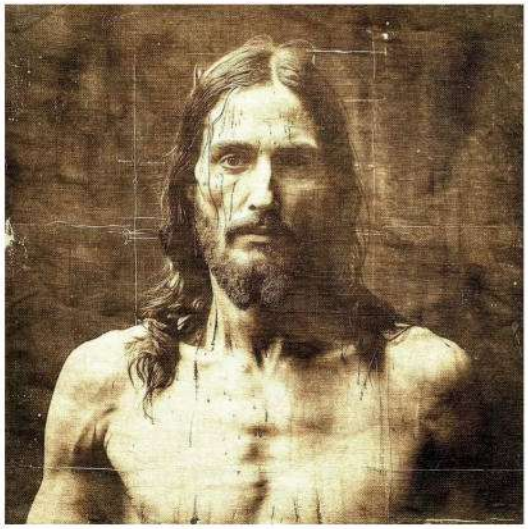
Caro, explained the discrepancy between his team's findings and the 1988 carbon dating, saying, "Fabric samples are usually subject to all kinds of contamination, which cannot be completely removed from the dated specimen. If the cleaning procedure of the sample is not thoroughly performed, carbon-14 dating is not reliable." He added that "This may have been the case in 1988, as confirmed by experimental evidence showing that when moving from the periphery towards the centre of the sheet, along the longest side, there is a significant increase in carbon-14".



DAILY EXPRESS / MIDJOURNEY

LEFT: The *Daily Express* newspaper got in on the action by using Midjourney to produce this AI rendition of the "face of Jesus based on the Shroud of Turin".

This research follows on the heels of an analysis of 14 threads from the Shroud commissioned from the Stable Isotopes Laboratory of the University of Hong Kong by American archæologist William Meacham, a member of the board of directors of the Shroud of Turin Education and Research Association (STERA). These came from a sample known as the "Raes piece" that was removed from the Shroud in 1973 for textile research and later passed to STERA. The Hong Kong team matched the isotopic makeup of the sample threads to that of samples from western Asia and discovered that they are consistent with an origin in the western Levant, a part of Asia occupied today by Israel, Lebanon and western parts of Jordan and Syria. As a result, Meacham says: "With a probable near Eastern origin, new doubts must be raised about interpreting the Shroud as simply a fake relic made in mediæval Europe."

Another 1970s sample was also reanalysed this year. In this case it was the material removed using adhesive tape in 1978, which had previously been used to suggest that the image was painted on the fabric. Professor Giulio Fanti, an engineer from the University of Padua, re-examined the particles using high-powered microscopes and published his results in the peer-reviewed journal *Archives of Hæmatology Case Reports*. Fanti's analysis found blood hæmoglobin in the sample and also creatine, normally only found in the blood of someone who had suffered trauma or a disease that caused muscle breakdown. The paper says, "The high percentage of creatinine found in [the sticky tape samples], may be explained, especially during Jesus' last hour before dying on the cross, by a reduced blood flow to the kidneys also caused by hypovolemia and by severe dehydration," which Fanti notes corresponds to John 19:28 where it states: "Jesus said, I thirst". Fanti also found signs that the person whose blood was in the samples had suffered from uremic syndrome, which occurs when the kidneys are unable to eliminate waste products, something that can be caused by blunt trauma to the organs, which would have been caused by Jesus being whipped prior to his crucifixion. Furthermore, the blood was also mixed with traces of earth that Fanti said are typical of that found in Jerusalem, noting that "geologist Amir Sandler of the Geological Survey of Jerusalem recognised among other things, smectite and illite, which are typical of the Jerusalem soil as well as other material coming from the Sahara winds." Fanti also claims to have found anomalous radiation traces in the sample, which he feels supports the theory that the image was imprinted on the Shroud by a burst of energy at Jesus's resurrection.

Inevitably, artificial intelligence (AI) has been getting in on the act as well, with an image of the face of Jesus allegedly derived from the Turin Shroud imprint created by AI doing the rounds. This, it seems, is not as scientific as it might first appear, originating not with any researchers or through any advanced scanning techniques. It comes from the *Daily Express* newspaper, who, prompted by the Italian research, did nothing more scientific than feed a prompt reading "face of Jesus based on the Shroud of Turin" into the publicly accessible AI Midjourney, then printing the result. *catholicherald.co.uk, 26 Mar; dailymail.co.uk, 19+22 Aug; express.co.uk, 21 Aug 2024.*

For previous Shroud updates, see **FT301:6, 324:24, 335:23, 418:11.**

EXTRA! EXTRA!

FT'S FAVOURITE HEADLINES FROM AROUND THE WORLD

HOME SCHOOL REGISTER TO END 'GHOST CHILD' CRISIS

Mail on Sunday, 10 Mar 2024.

London man accused of Isle of Wight butter knife assault

countypress.co.uk, 27 May 2024.

'FLOATING BUS STOPS ARE RISK FOR THE BLIND'

Sunday Times, 12 May 2024.

Council reports sticky tape damage to police

BBC News, 14 May 2024.

SEMI-NAKED SUSPECT ARRESTED AFTER DRESSING GOWN CHASE

BBC News, 27 Mar 2024.

Instant rush to become a devil

(Sydney) Daily Telegraph, 20 Mar 2024.

SIDELINES

SMALL PRINT SURPRISE

Dan Neidle of Tax Policy Associates placed an Easter egg in his company's online privacy policy when he revised their site in February. Deep down, in the cookie policy, he wrote "We will send a bottle of good wine to the first person to read this." It took until May for it to be claimed, and even then it was someone researching privacy policies for their own site. Neidle explained that it was "my childish protest that all businesses have to have a privacy policy, and no one reads it". *BBC News, 9 May 2024.*

WOULD IT MATTER?

The May primary to choose the Republican candidate to stand for Congress in Indiana's 7th District, including most of Indianapolis, was won by Jennifer Pace with 31.2% of the vote. However, Pace, 59, had died in March, after the deadline for withdrawing candidates from the ballot, without the authorities and most of the electorate noticing. One voter said, "No one knew she was dead. Last week I researched the candidates online. No mention of her death. No obituaries," while Griffin Reid, press secretary for the Indiana Republican Party, when asked whether the State party knew Pace had died, responded, "We do not". *washingtonexaminer.com, 8 May 2024.*

DEAD EASY JOB

The BBC caused some raised eyebrows when a job ad for an assistant producer on their careers mailing list explained that the applicant should "identify as dead, disabled or neurodivergent", rather than the intended "*deaf,* disabled or neurodivergent". *D,Mail, 20 Jun 2024.*

MARTIN ROSS

CURSES! | How Colonel Sanders took revenge on a Japanese baseball team and de Sade's unlucky manuscript found a new home

NO ORDINARY LOVE

According to author Joel Warner, the manuscript of the Marquis De Sade's *120 Days of Sodom* carries a curse that ruins the life of anyone who owns it. In his book *The Curse of the Marquis De Sade* he examines the book's origins and history, and the fates of those who have subsequently had it in their custody. The legendary classic, which prompted the coining of the word "Sadism", was written by De Sade while he was imprisoned in the Bastille after his mother-in-law's family used their influence to have him locked up following a series of sexual scandals that are likely to have formed the basis for his fiction.

In *120 Days of Sodom,* the Marquis writes of four aristocrats who imprison 16 teenagers in a castle and subject them to, as Warner puts it, "ever more extravagant scenes of violence, debauchery and sacrilege", creating a 157,000-word manuscript written in tiny handwriting on a scroll of paper 40 feet long. Paper was a precious commodity in the Bastille and De Sade used every inch he could, sewing the pages together for safekeeping. Unable to take the document with him when he was moved to the asylum at Charenton in 1789, he hid it in the Bastille, where it was later discovered by a labourer days before revolutionaries burned the prison to the ground.

According to Warner, it then brought nothing but trouble to its owners. Before it was finally published in 1904, as a volume supposedly of academic interest to sexologists, *120 Days* passed through several hands. The first person recorded as owning the scroll was the Marquis de Villeneuve-Trans, who took possession of it in the mid-1800s, and almost immediately hit money troubles that required him to sell off his chateau. Then, during the rest of the century, his descendants, the manuscript's subsequent owners, all died in their 50s and 60s.

The manuscript's subsequent owners all died in their 50s and 60s

While the German owner it was sold to in 1900 seems to have escaped unscathed, the Noailles family, descendants of De Sade, who acquired the scroll in 1929, had it stolen from them by a friend, who sold it to a man named Gérard Nordmann in Switzerland.

LEFT: The Marquis de Sade (below) wrote his *120 Days of Sodom* on a 40-ft long scroll of paper; that has reputedly brought its subsequent owners nothing but ill fortune.

NATIONAL LIBRARY OF FRANCE

Nordmann bought it in good faith but ended up plunged into years of expensive international legal wrangling over ownership of the manuscript. He eventually won and sold it to French manuscript dealer Gérard Lhéritier for his investment company, but Lhéritier was charged with fraud for allegedly running his company as a Ponzi scheme, where investors' dividends are paid with funds from later investors, rather than from company earnings.

This resulted in the manuscript being seized by the French government and auctioned, with it finally being recognised as a French National Treasure and purchased by the National Library of France, where hopefully it will cease to blight the lives of its owners. *D.Mail, 3 Mar 2023.*

THE COLONEL'S CURSE

In Osaka, Japan, the local baseball team, the Hanshin Tigers, founded in 1935, won their first Japan Series Championship in 1985. During boisterous victory celebrations in the city, Tigers fans turned their attention to the Colonel Sanders statue standing outside the KFC Dotonbori store, seeing a resemblance to the team's star player Randy Bass. They stole the statue and carried it round the city, tossing it in the air emulating the "douage" celebration, in which a winning player is carried and tossed by an appreciative crowd. The statue was eventually thrown into the Dotonbori river. While the Tigers won the Series that year, that was their last success for decades and the story

NEWSCOM / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

started to circulate that this was due to "the curse of Colonel Sanders" resulting from his statue's mistreatment by fans. Although searches of the river were carried out, no sign of the Colonel could be found, and he remained missing until 10 March 2009, when divers dealing with an unexploded bomb in the river discovered the top half of his statue buried in mud.

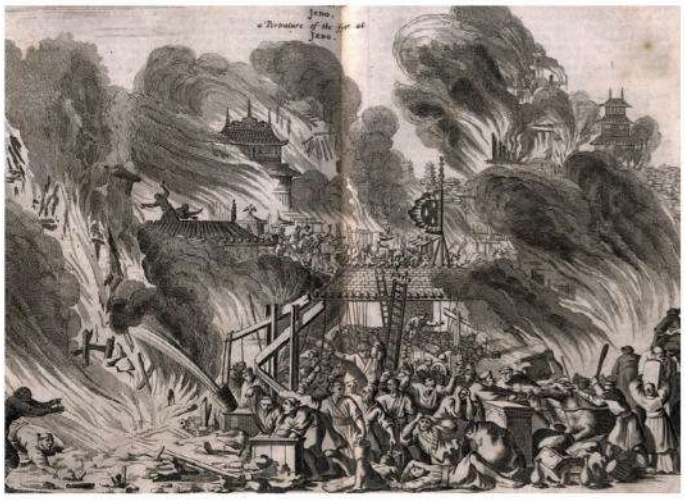
Further dives in the area turned up other severely damaged parts which were also retrieved, allowing the stature to be restored. Tigers fans celebrated his miraculous return, named the statue "Welcome back Colonel" and treated it as a symbol of good fortune, displaying it at events in Osaka and at the KFC Hanshin Koshien store near the Tigers' home stadium. It did not, however, seem to lift the curse, and it was not until 2023 that the Tigers defeated the Orix Buffaloes to win their first Japan Series title in 38 years, a win many Tigers fans celebrated by dressing in Colonel Sanders costumes.

However, by now, the statue, still owned by KFC Holdings Japan, had deteriorated so badly that it was difficult to store, and with the curse lifted, the company decided to dispose of it. On 8 March the company held a *ningyo kuyo* ceremony for the Colonel Sanders statue at Sumiyoshi Taisha shrine in Osaka, a special memorial service usually held for dolls and soft toys, attended by Takayuki Hanji, president of the company, and other executives, where they offered sake and fried chicken and said goodbye. "We want to thank all of the fans for their friendship and love for the statue," said the company. *asahi.com, 20 Mar 2024.*

KIMONO CURSE

A similar ceremony has been blamed for a great fire that destroyed Edo, the city now known as Tokyo, in Japan, in the 17th century. Known as the *Meireki no taka* – the Meireki era fire, it is also called the *furisode no kaji*, or long-sleeved kimono fire.

A *furisode*, or long-sleeved kimono, was traditionally worn by single girls to indicate they were available for marriage. The kimono in question, it is said, had been owned in succession by three teenage girls, all of whom died before they could marry, leading a priest to conclude it was cursed. He agreed to carry out a ceremony to destroy it, involving lighting a ritual fire to cremate the cursed kimono. However, this fire was fanned by a sudden gust of wind, causing it to ignite the temple structure and then the city, resulting in an inferno that destroyed almost 70 percent of Edo, which was largely built of wood and paper, killing up to 100,000 people. *D.Mail, 28 May 2024.*



TOP: The recovered statue of Colonel Sanders that was believed to have put a curse on the Hanshin Tigers baseball team after being chucked in a river in 1985. **ABOVE**: The Meireki era fire, said to have been started by the burning of a cursed kimono.

SIDELINES

AWKWARD

Barrister Ramya Nagesh, who wrote the leading reference book on sleepwalking and the law, ended up in front of a disciplinary tribunal accused of professional misconduct after allegedly falling asleep during a coroner's inquest. Nagesh was making a remote appearance at Pontypridd County Court in Wales while taking part in another inquest in Stockport, and apparently fell asleep while eating a baked potato during the inquest's lunch break and again later in the afternoon. Nagesh claimed this was due to fatigue and excessive sleepiness caused by a Covid infection, vitamin D insufficiency and a sleep disorder and was later cleared of all charges. *theguardian.com, 14 May 2024.*

LIGHT RELIEF

Having failed to see the Northern Lights while visiting Iceland, students Karim Akhtar, 22, and Sully Laurent, 21, believed they had finally been successful when they saw a purple glow in the sky over Norwich during the solar storm in May that made the aurora visible across the UK. They excitedly posted a video of their sighting on TikTok, only to be told that what they were seeing were the lights illuminating the Premier Inn on Duke Street in the city centre. Their video, however, went viral, being viewed over 6 million times, so Akhtar concluded: "It's certainly a good start to my TikTok career." *BBC News, 16 May 2024.*

WONDERWALL

A wall beside the A39 near Falmouth in Cornwall got dubbed "The Great Wall of China" in 2017 when a growing collection of china mugs started accumulating on it, peaking in 2018 with 40, all perfectly aligned. These eventually disappeared, but in late 2023, new mugs appeared, only to swiftly vanish again, replaced first by an array of dildos, then an assortment of china and rubber ducks, and most recently a selection of artfully arranged bricks. It is not clear who is responsible for placing the items, but Cornwall County Council has admitted removing them because they are "a distraction for drivers". *cornwalllive.com, 16 Feb 2024.*

SIDELINES...

ETERNAL LIFE?

The Fountain of Youth actually exists and can be found in a small park in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania. Built in 1938 to a design inspired by Roman spring houses, it used to be a popular place for locals to get water. However, in 1955 the pump was removed, and the fountain's use prohibited after it was found that the water was unsafe for human consumption due to bacterial contamination. *abc27.com, 11 May 2024*

ROOF NINJA

After being alerted to a mysterious extension cord protruding from a sign on the roof of a Family Fare supermarket in Michigan, police discovered a 34-year-old woman living inside it, who emerged dressed in black and wearing ski goggles. Her nest contained a coffee maker, computer, bedding, phone and even a printer, and she had been living there undetected for more than a year. Brennon Warren of the Midland Police Department said: "I honestly don't know how she was getting up there. She didn't indicate, either." Her exploits earned her the nickname "Roof Ninja". *news.sky.com, 22 May 2024.*

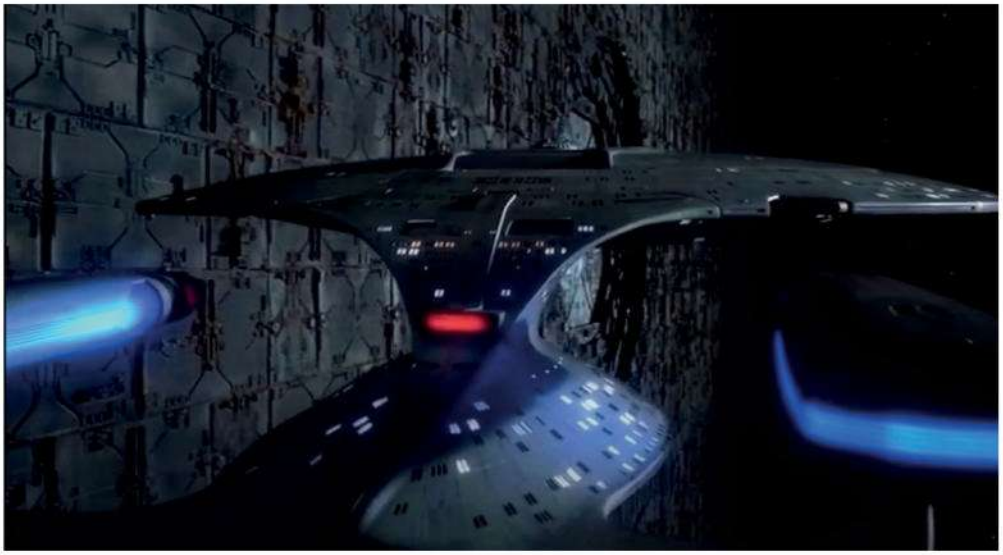
HOT TIPS

Competition for the best paying busking slots in Mexico City is fierce, and has been known to turn violent, but a mariachi band that ganged up on a fire eater to steal his pitch in front of a taco restaurant named El Inferno got more than they bargained for. After being put in a headlock and getting punched multiple times by band members, the fire eater fought back by snorting flames at the musicians, sending them fleeing with their clothes on fire. In CCTV of the incident one mariachi can be seen rolling on the ground to extinguish the flames, but none of the musicians were seriously injured. *news.sky.com, 21 May 2024.*

MARTIN ROSS

OUT THERE

Warp drive, Dyson Spheres, the vanishing of Vulcan and the search for the ninth planet



ABOVE: The *USS Enterprise* encounters a Dyson Sphere in *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. **BELOW**: Dyson Spheres are hypothetical alien megastructures proposed by theoretcial physicist Freeman Dyson in the 1960s. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** The *Enterprise* in orbit around the fictional planet of Vulcan in *Star Trek*; its astronomical counterpart has proven equally imaginary.

WARPED

In the 1990s physicist Miguel Alcubierre worked out that a *Star Trek* style warp drive that would allow a craft to travel at faster than light speeds was theoretically possible. To do this, it would need to make the fabric of space expand in front of it and contract behind it, creating a "warp bubble". This would use a possible, but as yet undiscovered, form of matter with "negative energy", and even then, there would still be problems keeping a warp bubble stable.

Katy Clough and colleagues at Queen Mary University of London considered the implications of Alcubierre warp drives and found that a warp-powered starship that was up to speed and travelling at a constant velocity wouldn't create any gravitational waves, but it would if accelerating or experiencing a malfunction. They conclude that "while one can require that initially, the warp bubble is constant, it will quickly evolve away from that state, and, in most cases, the warp fluid and spacetime deformations will disperse or collapse into a central point."

This means that we could potentially detect the gravity waves generated by a warp failure that caused a bubble collapse and so pick up on any aliens that are using the technology. We already have something capable of doing this: the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO). This is currently being used to investigate black holes but is sensitive enough to detect warp bubble collapses, although it is tuned to the wrong frequencies.

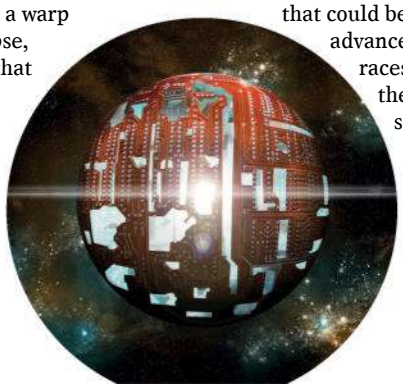
We could potentially detect the gravity waves generated by a warp failure

It does, however, mean that creating a device to detect warp signatures would be, Clough says, a "matter of funding" and not of engineering or science. If we did detect a warp bubble collapse, the incident that generated it would be catastrophic for any craft involved. "All of this curvature in the space-time that is in the warp bubble collapses inwards before it goes out again. In the same way as when you fall into a black hole, you get kind of pulled apart," says Clough. "It would be a very unpleasant place to be, I think." *newscientist.com, 12 Jun; futurism.com, 25 Jun 2024.*

SEARCHING FOR ALIEN SPHERES

Another group of scientists, this time an international collaboration between researchers in the US, UK, India, and Sweden, led by Matías Suazo, has also been thinking about how to detect alien technosignatures at a distance. They have been searching for evidence of aliens building Dyson spheres round their stars, using infrared and optical observations from the Gaia, WISE, and 2MASS astronomical surveys.

Dyson spheres are hypothetical megastructures that could be built by advanced alien races to enclose their entire solar system and harvest all the energy generated by its star,



STOCKTREK IMAGES, INC. / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

first proposed by the theoretical physicist Freeman Dyson in the 1960s. Now, it is thought that completely enclosing a solar system would be impractical, and that anyone contemplating building such a structure would probably create a mesh or a massive satellite array to do the job. Although a Dyson sphere would harvest the majority of energy from its star, it would still radiate excess infrared radiation, and it is this that Suazo and his team have been looking for, concentrating on finding potential partially built Dyson spheres, as these will have a stronger infrared signature.

To find such structures, the team developed a rigorous series of filters to sift through the data. "A specialised pipeline has been developed to identify potential Dyson sphere candidates focusing on detecting sources that display anomalous infrared excesses that cannot be attributed to any known natural source of such radiation," said Suazo.

Starting with over five million stars explored by the surveys, they filtered these down to just seven candidates for Dyson spheres, stars whose infrared emissions have so far not been explained by anything else. However, it has not been possible to exclude every natural possibility, so the result could still be due to something like warm debris discs surrounding the stars. The team are now going to make further observations of the target stars and aim to use optical spectroscopy to eliminate most of the remaining non-Dyson sphere possibilities.

"Either we'll rule them all out and say Dyson spheres are quite rare and very hard to find, or they'll hang around as candidates and we'll study the heck out of them," said Professor Jason Wright, one of the research team members. *deccanherald.com, 13 May; futurism.com, 17 May 2024.*

PLANET NINE FROM OUTER SPACE

Astronomers have long suspected that the very furthest reaches of our Solar System harbour an undiscovered ninth planet (now Pluto has been demoted to a minor planet) believed to be 20 times further away from the Sun than the Earth is, and between five and 10 times the Earth's size, taking up to 20,000 years to complete a single orbit.

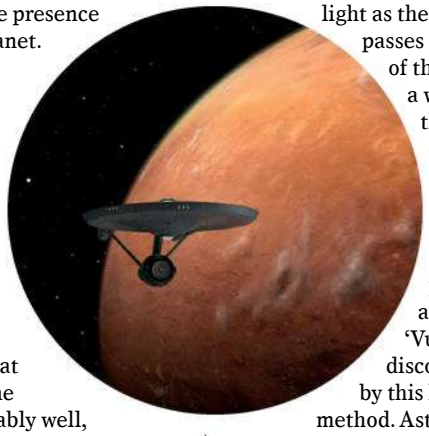
They base their suspicions on its apparent gravitational effects on known bodies in the Solar System that seem to have alignments that are unlikely to have happened by chance, betraying the presence of an unknown large object in the outer Solar System whose gravity is influencing their orbits. Being a planet, Planet Nine would not emit its own light, and, as it has to be extremely far out, it would not reflect significant amounts of sunlight, so is exceedingly difficult to detect, apart from through its gravitational influence. However, physicists Harsh Mathur, of Case Western Reserve University, and Katherine Brown, at Hamilton College, have put a different spin on the data that casts doubts on the presence of a ninth planet. They have applied a radical new approach to the theory of gravity known as Modified Newtonian Dynamics (MOND) and found that it explains the data remarkably well, without the need for an extra planet. MOND suggests that while Newton's law of gravity is fine under most circumstances, when the gravitational acceleration predicted by the law drops below a certain point, a different gravitational behaviour takes over.

On a galactic scale, MOND provides a plausible alternative to the idea that there are vast but undetectable quantities of "dark matter" governing the motion of galaxies. "MOND is really good at explaining galactic-scale observations," Mathur said, "but I hadn't expected that it would have noticeable effects on the outer Solar System." Brown added, "We wanted to see if the data that support the Planet Nine hypothesis would effectively rule out MOND," but instead they found that the theory precisely predicts the clustering of objects that was being attributed to Planet Nine. "The alignment was striking," Mathur said. *sciencedaily.com, 5 Oct 2023.*

VULCAN VANISHES

Astronomers have now detected more than 5,000 exoplanets orbiting other stars, but all may not be what they seem. One of these exoplanets was thought to orbit a star known as 40 Eridani A or 'Keid', which is part of a triple star system about 16.3 light-years from Earth. In the *Star Trek* mythos, this system is the location of Spock's home world, so it was inevitable that the planet, officially known as HD 26965 b, would be dubbed 'Vulcan'.

However, exoplanets are not detected directly by viewing them; their presence is inferred from the dimming of a star's light as the planet passes in front of them, or by a wobble in the star caused by the gravity of orbital worlds pulling at it. 'Vulcan' was discovered by this latter method. Astronomer Abigail Burrows of Dartmouth College, however, now thinks that Keid's wobble is caused by "pulses and jitters" of the star itself, not by the tug of orbiting worlds.



Burrows's team analysed Keid using new high-precision methods and drew the conclusion that the signal taken to show the existence of HD 26965 b is actually caused by something flickering on the surface of Keid approximately every 42 Earth days, probably plasma rising and falling in the star to create sunspots or similar. This means that there is now no evidence of an exoplanet orbiting the star, so Vulcan has been struck off the list. *space.com, 29 May 2024.*

SIDELINES...

POLITICAL SNAKEPIT

Following his failed attempt to be elected West Virginia Secretary of State, Doug Skaff was taking down campaign signs in Danville, when he was bitten by copperhead snakes. Initially, he thought he had stepped on barbed wire or a piece of glass and went on to pick up more signs, but on feeling the pain again, he looked down to see a snake, which then bit him a second time. Fortunately, after a dose of antivenom and a short stay in hospital, Skaff made a full recovery. *wsaz.com, 16 May 2024.*

FLORIDA PRIEST

Father Fidel Rodriguez of St Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church in St Cloud, Florida, ended up under arrest after allegedly biting an unidentified woman during a brawl that interrupted Communion at the church. The woman claimed the fight started because Rodriguez would not give her "the cookie" during communion, alleging it was due to her "sexuality or attire", while Rodriguez said it was because she had not confessed before the service and had tried to grab the wafers he was holding, adding that he did not care about her sexuality or clothes. *dailymail.co.uk, 23 May 2024.*

FIRE FAIL

In December 2023, the Rikers Island Correctional Facility in New York opened a new unit for persistent arsonists. It was, however, closed the next day by building inspectors on the grounds that it lacked fire prevention equipment. *corrections1.com, 6 Dec 2023.*

CHILLI CHAOS

Chester indoor market had to be cordoned off by emergency services and evacuated because of a stallholder "cooking a large amount of chillies". Fumes from the frying peppers entered the ventilation system and spread through the building resulting in customers choking, coughing, crying and fleeing in panic while the fire service cleared the market wearing breathing apparatus. In the US, workers making Doritos "Flamin' Hot" corn chips complained of "sneezing, coughing, eye and skin irritation, runny nose, sore throat, chest discomfort and difficulty breathing" from inhaling the seasoning all day, leading to the manufacturer to promise extra extraction fans. *theguardian.com, 27 Jan 2024; The Courier-Mail (Queensland) 30 Dec 2023.*

SIDELINES...

WEED WORKOUT

Laurel Gibson and her research team at University of Colorado Boulder have discovered that smoking cannabis increases positive mood and enjoyment during exercise... but they acknowledge that it also makes it much harder to muster sufficient motivation to actually do any exercise. *Courier-Mail (Queensland) 5 Jan 2024.*

EXTREMELY RED SQUIRRELS

The appearance of bright red squirrels in Patterson, 75 miles (121km) north of New York City, puzzled conservation officers, who set up a surveillance operation to try and work out how they were getting coated in paint. Eventually they tracked the colourful animals to a house where the owner "admitted to trapping the squirrels and painting them in order to keep track of those returning to his yard". The man was later charged with various wildlife crimes and state officials commented, "Never thought we'd have to say this, but don't paint squirrels!" *miamiherald.com, 5 Feb 2024.*

POO PROPAGANDA

South Korea has accused North Korean authorities of sending at least 260 balloons loaded with fæces, toilet paper and other "filthy waste and trash" over the border, where they burst, spreading their contents over city streets. North Korea's vice-minister of defence Kim Kang Il said this was to retaliate against the "frequent scattering of leaflets and other rubbish" in his country by the South Koreans. South Korean activists responded by sending balloons carrying anti-Pyongyang leaflets and USB sticks containing Korean pop music and videos back north across the border. *BBC News, 29 May 2024.*

MARTIN ROSS

MORE TUT TROUBLE

Did the ancient Egyptians create a radioactive 'curse'?

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

ABOVE: Could Howard Carter's famous excavations have released dangerous radioactive materials?

While the idea that Tutankhamun's tomb was protected by a curse that wreaked havoc on the lives of all associated with its discovery has been proved baseless numerous times, it does not stop people from coming up with potential causes for the alleged "curse" deaths (see **FT304:16-17, 386:28-36, 422:15**).

Writing in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, Ross Fellowes proposed that blood cancers caused by radiation could have been responsible for at least some of the deaths, suggesting that the ancient Egyptians deliberately seeded their tombs with radioactive materials to protect them. He says, "A survey of modern-era field Egyptologists reveals a very high incidence of unusual deaths consistent with symptoms of hæmatopoietic cancer, a scenario that parallels radiation sickness caused by exposure to abnormally high radiation previously reported in ancient tombs."

The Valley of the Kings is limestone, which is a rock with a naturally low level of radiation, but when Fellowes compared the recorded radiation levels in tombs with the natural background levels, he found them to be considerably higher. He also researched literature relating to Egyptian funerary techniques and says that he found a "reference to saffron cake in portions of 2-3-5 (yellowcake uranium U-235), giving power by means of an invisible 'efflux', and leaving a legacy of hazardous 'excrements' (wastes) which were buried in an underground 'tomb' called the *per D'jet* (house of millions of years)". He also claims that references to "magic burning power" in ancient Egyptian texts referred to radioactive materials, saying "Memory of the 'magic burning power' was preserved in Egyptian language as the *ta-djeser* (cleared, isolated) area surrounding the *per D'jet* underground storage vault, which passed down the generations into the Arabic *Haram el-Mastabat*, the forbidden, prohibited tomb containing illahat evil spirits." He ties this to a text known as the *Lamentations of Ipuwer*, quoting a section that says "plague stalked the land; a burning power went forth; women, beasts, and crops were barren; we know not what happened; all goeth to ruin; mankind is destroyed. A few senseless people divulged the magic spells of the cursed inaccessible place, the secrets of the lords whose limits were unknown," which he views as indicating some sort of radiation-related incident in Egyptian prehistory. Fellowes suggests that this took place around 3000-2500 BC, resulting in the organised burial of long-life nuclear wastes and proposes that this material was then used to protect tombs, producing the anomalous radioactivity readings.

However, he says, "No commentary is offered on the who, how, and why questions relating to the implied technology, which is outside the scope of this paper," adding that "This hypothesis is quite unorthodox and contrary to perceived views of ancient Egyptian history, but it is sufficiently supported to warrant further direct investigation." *express.co.uk, 24 Jun 2024.*

CLASSICAL CORNER

FORTEANA FROM THE ANCIENT WORLD COMPILED BY BARRY BALDWIN

302: ROYSTERING

(Supplement to previous ostreology, **FT379:15**)

"Fried oysters and bottles of beer!" – Fort on his newspaper job, quoted in Steinmeyer's biography (p40).

"He must have been unaware not only of abstrusities, but of icicles and bananas and oysters" – Fort, *Books*, p349, on Copernicus.

For detailed study with cornucopia of primary references, see AC Andrews, 'Oysters as a food in Greece and Rome', *Classical Journal* 43 (1948, 299-303 – available online. Huge bivalve bibliography clam-ours for attention. JR Philpots, *Oysters, and All about Them* (1890) weighs in at 1,370 pages, preceded by ECG Murray, *The Oyster: Where, How and When to Find, Breed, Cook and Eat It* (1861), postluded by MFK Fisher, *Consider the Oyster* (1941). Drew Smith's *Oyster: a World History, with Recipes* (2011) begins: "Oysters are older than us. Older than grass. Here at the start of civilization, at the start of the world."

Up to a point, Lord Copper. We have the Rolex Oyster Perpetual, Oyster Cards, the Blue Oyster Cult with its ersatz-classical *Cultosaurus Erectus* album, and doubtless sundry others. As *The Kerryman* (11 April 2019) headlined: "Up to their oxsters in oysters as Festival Fun begins in Bally..."

Samuel Johnson would go out to buy oysters for his cat Hodge, not wanting to humiliate his servants by making them work for an animal.

Oyster shells have been found in abundance by archæologists in the areas where common groundlings stood to watch Shakespeare and Ben Jonson at the Globe and Rose Theatres, suggesting they were the Elizabethan popcorn.

Various Greek writers categorise oysters by geographical locations, describe their qualities, one calling them the Nereid Thetis's truffles, and often served them at dinner as appetisers. Otherwise, they are little regarded, perhaps as Andrews suggests, because the Greeks made only abortive efforts to raise them artificially.

The Romans, though, were oyster-crazy. Sensing a lucrative niche-market here, one Sergius Orata (c. 95 BC) came up with new ways of harvesting the bivalves and creating artificial beds. An adjunct enterprise was luxury villa property developments by the Lucrine Lake in Campania, prompting lawyer Crassus to quip: "Even if deprived of the lake's waters, he would still find oysters on his roof-tiles."

Orata is also credited with inventing hypocausts (underfloor heating) and hanging thermal baths for healthy recreation. A true 'Thatcher's child', all this made him immensely rich and famous, his name deriving from an homonymous golden fish.

Tacitus (*Agricola*, ch12) claims one incentive to Roman invasion of Britain was the perceived chance to profit from native pearls and native failure to take advantage thereof. They may have been disappointed, in that I've read (true?) that prize pearls (as Tacitus seems to realise) tend to occur mainly in warm water oysters.

In *You Only Live Twice*, James Bond shacks up with local pearl diver Kissy Suzuki – Don't Forget the Diver (*ITMA*). This profession is anciently attested, along with the grim warning that their fingers were often severed by sudden closures of sharp-edged shells.

Pliny (*Natural History*, bk32 ch21) kicks off his oyster disquisition by rating them Rome's Number One dinner treat. Along with enumerating their geographical sources and quality differences, he lists their versatile health benefits, being said to be effective antidotes against poison, and a reliable cure for numerous breasts, ulcerated bladders, constipation, and colds – also (when reduced to ash) good for women's complexions and tooth-powders.

Apicius's *Cookbook* has several oyster recipes, mainly involving incorporating them with other comestibles, including stuffing roast pigs with them, the ancestor of carpet-bag steaks and a dish found on many websites.

The ultimate oyster connoisseur was Montanus, one of Domitian's courtiers (AD 81-96). Juvenal's Fourth Satire describes how the emperor convened an emergency meeting to discuss how to cook a giant fish just sent to him as a present. Montanus (exact identity unknown, possibly the one who had been a friend of Nero) was (as we now have to say) obesity-challenged. Juvenal introduces him thus: "There entered the enormous gut of Montanus, followed by Montanus." Near the end, he is re-introduced in these words: "No man in my time was a greater gourmet. He could tell at the first bite what bed an oyster came from: Circeii, the Lucrine Lake, or Richborough."

Inevitably, they were also prized as aphrodisiacs; a long-lasting delusion. Casanova ate 50 per day at breakfast to ensure he would rise to all occasions. Balzac downed a 100 at one go before embarking on a meal worthy of Mr Creosote – full details in Ankha Muhistein's delightful catalogue *Balzac's Omelette* (2010). This erotic daftness persisted down to modern music. In Kingsley Amis's *Take a Girl Like You*, the womanising Julian Ormerod hums: "Oysters is amorous/Lobsters is lecherous/ But Shrimp would do at a pinch."

A website favourite is the assertion that emperor Vitellius wolfed down 1,000 oysters at a sitting. Source for this is elusive – significantly not in Suetonius's description of his gluttony: Andrews left him out, a telling silence. A later emperor, Clodius Albinus, is credited by the *Augustan Histories* biography of consuming 400. Louis XIV could manage 100 in one go. Describing the New Orleans Oyster Festival, the *Guardian* (5 June 2015) records that winner Sonya Thomas downed 492 in the specified time of eight minutes; runner-up Adrian Morgan surrendered after 432.

Roman emperor Verus died from eating tainted oysters. No lurid tales of choking on them, though it surely happened. One lucky escape for our world was that of Kylie Minogue who slurps them down during breaks in her concerts and nearly died when a monster one in Dublin stuck in her throat. Mercifully, she was saved by personal cook Giles Broe.

"It was a bold man that first ate an oyster" – attributed to Jonathan Swift, though first said by King James I. The good Dean would change his mind and pen an ode to them, stressing their aphrodisiac power; he has Gulliver eating raw ones.

Disclosure time. I've eaten rock oysters in Sydney and a complimentary dozen in a New Orleans bar. Frankly, I can take them or leave them – no ostreophile, I...

ARCHÆOLOGY A MONTHLY EXCAVATION OF ODDITIES AND ANTIQUITIES

PAUL SIEVEKING digs up a well-travelled Buddha, some ancient shoes and the world's oldest lipstick

BUDDHA IN EGYPT

A 28in (71cm) tall statue of the Buddha, standing and holding parts of his robes in his left hand, has been found in Berenice Troglodytica, also known as Berenike, an ancient Egyptian seaport on the western shore of the Red Sea. The city was founded by Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285–246 BC), who named it after his mother, Berenice I of Egypt. The statue, found in the forecourt of an early period Roman temple dedicated to the goddess Isis, is thought to date to between AD 90 and 140 and is the first statue of Buddha ever found west of Afghanistan. Various fragmentary parts of Buddha statues (torsos, heads) had already been discovered at Berenike in 2019, some made of local gypsum. During the Roman period, Berenike was one of the primary waystations for the trade of war elephants and exotic goods such as pepper, semi-precious stones, cloth, and ivory, transported between India, Sri Lanka, Arabia, and Upper Egypt.

Around the head of the statue is a halo of sunlight, often found in Buddhist iconography and religious texts, describing how Lord Buddha emitted rays of light (of different colours: blue, yellow, red and white) during the time of nirvana and Parinirvana. The stone used for the statue may have originated from a region south of Istanbul, with one theory suggesting that traders from India had the statue carved locally and dedicated to the nearby temple. Excavations of the temple discovered an inscription in Sanskrit, dating back to the time of the Roman emperor Marcus Julius Philippus (better known as 'Philip the Arab'), who reigned from AD 244 to 249, in addition to Greek inscriptions from the 1st century BC. Archæologists also uncovered two coins from the central Indian kingdom of Satavahana, an ancient Indian dynasty based in the Deccan region. The Satavahanas were one of the first Indian kingdoms to produce state coinage struck with images of their rulers, with the two coins found at Berenice Troglodytica dated to around the 2nd century AD. *heritagedaily.com, 27 April; livescience.com, 3 May 2023.*

EGYPTIAN MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND ANTIQUITIES

MYSTERY OGHAM STONE

During lockdown in 2020, geography teacher Graham Senior dug up a strange stone while weeding his garden in Coventry. It features a series of lines in Ogham script inscribed on three of its sides. The piece of sandstone is just 11cm (4in) long and is believed to have been carved sometime between the 4th and 6th century AD. Teresa Gilmore, finds liaison officer for Staffordshire and West Midlands, said: "Most Ogham inscriptions are generally found in the more Celtic areas – Scotland, Ireland and down in Cornwall – you don't generally get them down in the Midlands."

Katherine Forsyth from the University of Glasgow partially translated the script to reveal a name: Mael Dumcail. Mr Senior said his theory was that the stone could have been a keepsake, possibly carried by a Roman soldier. Ms Gilmore said another theory was that it could have been used by Irish tradesmen to make contact with each other. Ogham was highly unusual among world writing systems, consisting solely of parallel lines in groups of one to five. The stone could provide an insight into the Irish language before the use of the Latin insular script. Ms Gilmore hopes to learn more when the rest of the stone is translated. *BBC News, 9 May 2024*.

HERBERT ART GALLERY AND MUSEUM

TOP: The strange stone with Ogham inscriptions dug up by geography teacher Graham Senior while weeding his garden in Coventry. **ABOVE**: Graham with Ali Wells, exhibition curator at the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum in Coventry. **LEFT**: Two views of the Buddha statue found in Egypt.

Around the head is a halo of sunlight, often found in Buddhist iconography

EUROPE'S OLDEST SHOES

Scientists have identified what they believe are the oldest shoes ever found in Europe. They were discovered in the 19th century in a cave system in southern Spain, along with stone tools and ancient boar teeth. They were found in the 200ft (60m)-deep Cueva de los Murciélagos, known in English as the Cave of the Bats, when miners started excavating nitrogen-rich bat guano or droppings in the 19th century. They were preserved thanks to the very low humidity levels inside the cave. The items, which included cylindrical baskets, were all made from a fibre called esparto grass, used to this day in Spain to make baskets and hats.

A collection of 76 surviving artefacts has now been analysed by Spanish scientists, who found that the espadrille-type sandals are around 6,000 years old, making them the oldest shoes ever found in Europe. They are significantly older than the grass and leather footwear worn by Otzi the Iceman, the hunter-gatherer who lived about 5,000 years ago and whose well-preserved body was found on

UNIVERSITY OF ALCALA

LEFT: A mallet (left) and the remains of two 6,000-year-old sandals were among the ancient artefacts discovered in the Cave of Bats in southern Spain. **BELOW LEFT**: The child's leather shoe unearthed in Austria. **BOTTOM LEFT**: A chunk of Tyrian purple dye made from snails discovered at the Roman bathhouse excavation site at Carlisle Cricket Club.

a high mountain pass on the border between Italy and Austria in 1991. Twisted or braided cords would have secured the sandals to the feet of the hunter-gatherers who wore them. Of the items that survived, carbon dating showed that the oldest items are more than 9,000 years old and were created by hunter-gatherers during the Mesolithic age. The sandals and baskets are considered to be the most intact plant-based objects from prehistoric Europe. *msn.com, 29 Sept 2023.*

ANCIENT CHILD'S SHOE

A shoe belonging to a child and dating back more than two millennia has been unearthed in Austria with its laces still intact. The design of the leather shoe, whose size roughly corresponds to EU 30 (US 12), suggests it was likely made in the 2nd century BC. The shoe was excavated in the western village of Dürrnberg, where rock salt mining took place from as early as the Iron Age. The salt, which is particularly good at preserving organic remains, is thought to have kept the shoe in extremely good condition. It was found among other organic remains, including a fragment of a wooden shovel blade, as well as remains of fur with lacing that might have come from a fur hood. The remnants of the shoe's lacing found preserved were likely made of flax or linen. *edition.cnn.com, 20 Sept 2023.*

WORLD'S OLDEST LIPSTICK

The world's oldest known lipstick was worn up to 5,000 years ago in what is now southern Iran. The deep red lip-paint, contained in a stone vial, was found at an ancient graveyard site in 2001, but it took researchers until now to identify it. Unlike modern lipsticks, it was

GERMAN MINING MUSEUM BOCHUM

ANNA GIECCO

probably applied with a brush.

The discovery sheds new light on "public images of female allure" in the fast-changing Bronze Age. The vial containing the cosmetic paste was unearthed at a third millennium BC graveyard near the Halil River in Kerman Province, in south-eastern Iran. It was one of numerous artefacts that surfaced after flooding and fell into the hands of looters before being recovered by the Iranian authorities. Analysis linked it to the "powerful" Bronze Age Marhasi civilisation that flourished in that part of Mesopotamia at the time. Archæology professor Massimo Vidale at the University of Padua in Italy said: "We were surprised because the substance was very different from the grey, compact ones we had previously found in other flagons. When we entered a chisel into the opening, a loose, homogeneous powder, dark grey-purplish in colour, spilled out." When the team analysed the dried-up powder, they found it contained hematite, "giving the paste a deep red colour". This, combined with other ingredients including vegetable oils and waxes, formed "exactly what one would expect in a modern lipstick," said Prof Vidale. He was wary of any definitive claim to have discovered the world's oldest lipstick, since there was always the possibility that an earlier sample might turn up. *BBC News, 14 Mar 2024*.

ROMAN SNAIL DYE

A rare dye made from snails for the robes of the Roman elite almost 2,000 years ago was unearthed at Carlisle Cricket Club last October. After several months of chemical analysis, it was identified as a chunk of Tyrian purple roughly the size of a ping pong ball, mixed with beeswax to preserve it. A Roman bathhouse was discovered at the site in 2017 and in the last three years 2,000 items including pottery, weapons, coins and semi-precious stones have been found.

Lead archæologist Frank Giecco said the find was of "international significance" and the first time the precious pigment had been discovered in the UK. He said the pigment was worth more than gold and would have been used to dye the clothes of figures in the imperial court and the "highest echelons" of society. He said it was made from the glands of marine snails and about 12,000 were needed to obtain less than 2g of pigment. "The collection of the snails and processing of the glands would have been very time-consuming," he said. "Hence the reason it was so expensive. It was used in ancient Greek and Roman wall paintings, as well as used as a dye in textiles."

Other finds uncovered at the site include a pair of Roman god sculptures discovered in May last year and thought to date back as far as AD 200. The sandstone heads once formed part of sculptures standing 12ft to 15ft (3.5 to 4.5m) high. In 2021, tiles with a Roman imperial stamp were uncovered indicating a link to third century Emperor Septimius Severus, who came from Libya. The bathhouse is dedicated to his wife and uses a north African style of bathhouse construction. *BBC News, 2 May 2024*.

Fairies, fakes and photos

DAVID HAMBLING looks back at the long history of fortean photographic deceptions

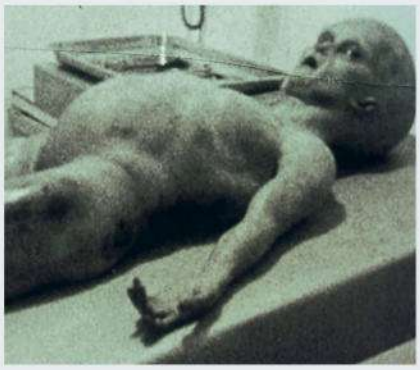
We live in the age of the deepfake AI image and misleading digital pictures. But the issue goes back much further; the rise and fall of iconic images has been a recurrent theme in *Fortean Times*'s first 50 years. Understanding how this keeps happening may help us recognise the pattern.

The phrase "the camera never lies" was around in 1859, but even then photographers were using double exposures to produce fake ghosts. These were mainly created for entertainment, but sometimes tricksters tried to pass them off as genuine. The public soon became wise to the fact that images can be retouched or show things which are not really there, and the psychic images in Fort's day were too similar to well-known illusions to be credible. However, experts learned to distinguish whether a photograph had been manipulated or was "genuine", and the great days of paranormal photography arrived.

The Cottingley Fairy photographs, taken in 1917 and 1920 by two young girls near Bradford, appeared to show tiny fairy creatures. Most people assumed a hoax, though some, including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, enthusiastically accepted the pictures as real. It was only in the 1980s that the two cousins admitted they had faked the pictures with carboard cut-outs of fairies copied from a magazine (see **FT53:48-53, 356:30-35, 410:14-15**).

The 'Surgeon's Photograph' sparked another long-running controversy. Published in 1934, it appeared to show a huge, long-necked creature swimming in Loch Ness. Again, many were sceptical, suggesting that the object was smaller than claimed and was actually driftwood or a bird. To others, though, the Surgeon's Photograph was the best hard evidence of an actual Loch Ness monster. In 1991, after more than 50 years, the perpetrators admitted the hoax. As the sceptics had suspected, the object in the Surgeon's Photograph was small, a toy submarine with a head and neck made from putty (see **FT76:15, 308:42-46**).

In 1995 the celebrated Alien Autopsy video released by Ray Santilli produced new iconic imagery. The video supposedly showed the body of an extraterrestrial recovered from a crashed UFO in Roswell in 1947. A tsunami of online debate followed, with learned discussions of whether telephone leads and other background items supported or disproved the authenticity of the video. As with the other two cases, sceptics were not swayed, but believers were convinced that the video was proof of alien visitors. In 2016, over 20 years after releasing the video, Santilli finally admitted it was faked (see **FT81:41-43, 395:32-37**). These three cases come from widely different worlds – the supernatural, cryptozoology and ufology – but they share common factors.



The video supposedly showed the body of an extraterrestrial recovered from Roswell

They were all deliberately created, knowing hoaxes. Unlike blurry, innocently-taken photos – UFO or aircraft? Panther or tomcat? – they are striking pictures of seemingly anomalous phenomena.

Secondly, all three played to an audience eager to have their beliefs confirmed and a wider public wanting to be entertained. None of them would have gone viral or persisted for so many decades otherwise.

Thirdly, all were created by pointing a camera at a fake subject. The current obsession is over computer-generated images, but older methods are harder to see through. While modern experts can tell whether a digital image has been tampered with, determining if it actually shows what it is claimed is harder. Details like lighting, shadows and background elements may help show if it was really taken when and where claimed, but these are often not conclusive.

Fourthly, even seemingly reliable sources can be hoaxers. The Surgeon's Photograph was supposedly taken by Robert Wilson, MB BChir, FRCSEd no less, a respected general surgeon and gynæcologist. The picture was actually taken by Ian Wetherell, an actor, working in cahoots with his father, but the hoaxers invited Wilson to act as front man exactly because his respectability made it credible. Wilson apparently participated because he liked a good practical joke, something investigators overlooked. The cousins who took the Cottingley Fairy pictures were depicted as innocent young girls, surely incapable of deception, let alone of fooling adults.

These cases also show how tenaciously perpetrators will stick to a hoax, even without a financial motive. Both Santilli and the Cottingley pair claimed that while the images had been faked, what they had depicted was real. The girls said they had met real fairies, while Santilli said that he had seen the real alien autopsy film, but the footage had deteriorated before he could get the rights to it. Santilli had simply 'reconstructed' the original in his video.

The Catholic Church terms these 'pious frauds,' fake relics created with the good intention of inspiring the faithful. The Turin Shroud might fall into this category. Long claimed to be a relic of Jesus, in 1988 the Shroud was carbon-dated to the mediæval period when it first appeared [although see p4-5 for the latest dating of the Shroud]. Whoever created it doubtless believed a genuinely miraculous shroud existed and this was just a way of sharing it. Hoaxers may believe they are revealing a greater truth rather than hoaxing. No interrogation or lie detector will unmask someone who believes their own story.

The Surgeon's Photograph, on the other hand, was pure revenge. The *Daily Mail* had mocked Wetherell Senior for falling for an early Loch Ness hoax, and selling them the fake photograph was his payback. It seems odd that he did not reveal the hoax, but perhaps Wetherell preferred private satisfaction to publicly humiliating the paper. Some hoaxers' motives are obscure.

Finally, none of the images swayed the sceptics. The old warning that "if something sounds too good to be true, then it probably is" seems applicable here. In all these cases, the only people taken in were those who were a little too willing to believe.

The classic hoax, then, is a clear image which supports a body of existing beliefs, coming from a seemingly reliable source who may themselves believe in what it shows, and which sceptics warn may have been faked. As the Romans said, "let the buyer beware."

IG NOBELS 2024

This year's award-winning research included pigeon missiles, drunken worms and the surprising ability to breathe through your anus...

ASSOCIATED PRESS / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: A team of Japanese researchers perform a demonstration showing that many mammals are capable of breathing through their anus while accepting the 2024 Ig Nobel Physiology Prize.

Every year since 1991, a month before the Swedish Academy announces the Nobel Prizes, *The Annals of Improbable Research* presents its IgNobel Prizes, awarded for "achievements that first make people laugh and then make them think". Most awards go to research published during the previous 12 months, but the 2024 Ig Nobels had a distinctly retro flavour to them, with two awards going to historic experiments. The Peace Prize went to legendary, and these days, infamous, psychologist BF Skinner for work done in WWII to investigate the feasibility of training pigeons to act as missile guidance systems. This involved harnessing the birds above a translucent plastic screen and training them to peck at a projected image of a target and using that to guide the weapon (see **FT186:53**). A prototype missile was built, but its demonstration was met with "restrained merriment" from the supervisory committee, and though it performed perfectly, it was never deployed. The Biology Prize also went to a 1940s experiment by Fordyce Ely and William E Petersen where an inflated paper bag was burst next to a cat standing on the back of a cow as part of an investigation into cows' milking behaviour.

Of the current research receiving accolades, what seems to have caught everyone's attention was the Physiology Prize that went to a Japanese team for discovering that many mammals are capable of breathing, or at least absorbing oxygen, through their anus. This came out of work done during Covid when there was a shortage of ventilators to assist patients' breathing. The team noted that the loach, a bottom dwelling fish, can absorb oxygen anally, so tried it with mice and pigs, discovering that they too could take in oxygen that way and that the method could successfully treat respiratory failure. They wrote this up in a paper explaining that "enteral ventilation" offered "a new paradigm" to help patients and are now conducting human trials. The Botany Prize was awarded to Jacob White and Felipe Yamashita for discovering that an unusual Chilean vine, *Boquila trifoliolata*, which imitates the characteristics of nearby plants, could be induced to imitate artificial plants too, suggesting a rudimentary form of plant vision must be involved. The Anatomy Prize went to Professor Roman Khonsari, a craniofacial surgeon from Paris, and his team, who explored whether hair whorls on human heads swirl in different directions in the northern and southern hemispheres. They found that hair whorls in children from the Southern hemisphere were oriented counterclockwise more frequently than in children from the Northern hemisphere, although they admitted that "more research" was needed before they could suggest a mechanism for this.

The Medicine Ig Nobel went to Lieven A Schenk, Tahmine Fadai and Christian Büchel, who showed that fake medicines that had painful side effects were better placebos than fake medicines that didn't, and the Physics award was won by James C Liao for demonstrating and explaining the swimming abilities of a dead trout, work done as part of a project exploring energy efficient swimming by fish. Liao had found that live trout can exploit swirling vortices to move upstream without expending any mechanical energy and went on to show that a dead trout exhibited "unnervingly similar kinematics to a live fish, with the exception that it cannot put on the brakes". A Probability Prize awarded this year, which was given to a mainly Dutch team who flipped coins 350,757 times to show that, when flipped, a coin tends to land on the same side that it started, and another Dutch team won the chemistry prize for separating drunk tubifex worms from sober ones by means of chromatography.

Research on a theme close to many fortean hearts bagged the Demography Prize. This was carried out by Dr Saul Newman at the University of Oxford, who discovered that there was a correlation between locations where people claim to live extraordinarily long lives and places where there is significant poverty, short average lifespans and no birth certificates and where clerical errors and pension fraud are rife. Among other things he found was that in 1997 there were 30,000 Italians claiming a pension while dead and that in 2010 more than 230,000 alleged Japanese centenarians turned out to be missing, imaginary, dead or the result of clerical errors – an error rate of 82 per cent. "Extreme old age records are a statistical basket case," explained Newman. "From the level of individual cases, up to broad population patterns, virtually none of our old-age data makes sense."

The Ig Nobels returned to live awards this year and took place at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Several teams acted out their prizewinning research and delivered "24/7" lectures in which they explained their subject in 24 seconds, then in seven words. Winners got an obsolete Zimbabwean ten trillion-dollar bill, (£16.50 on eBay) and a "transparent box" containing items relating to "Murphy's Law", the principle that anything that can go wrong will go wrong, which was the theme of this year's ceremony. Some of the items that were supposed to be in the box were missing and the box itself was "almost impossible to open". *arstechnica.com, theguardian.com, 12 Sept; editions.cnn.com, 13 Sept 2024.*

Byronic spectres

ALAN MURDIE pays a visit to Newstead Abbey in search of literary phantoms and Gothic ghosts

ABOVE: "Newstead Abbey, the Seat of the Late Lord Byron" in a 19th century engraving after Moses Webster (1792-1870).

Back in June, being serendipitously in Nottinghamshire, I enjoyed the opportunity of visiting the revered and allegedly much-haunted Newstead Abbey again, after more than 30 years, kindly guided by distinguished parapsychologist Dr Cal Cooper of the University of Northampton. It was an opportunity to revisit this most delightful of stately homes and its grounds, long a favourite of both literary pilgrims and ghost hunters.

Newstead is a place suffused with romantic and fantastic associations owing to its indelible connection with Lord George Gordon Byron, the romantic poet (1788-1824). In the afterglow of such a charismatic figure who left innumerable extraordinary myths, controversies and fictions in his wake, the task of filtering out the real facts proves well-nigh impossible. Thus, anyone writing of the ghosts at Newstead is either going to end up debunking them or mythologising them, since it is so hard for anything approaching truth to prevail.

Byron himself has no need to haunt there, his immortality already assured through his verses and in having already ranked as a phantom during his lifetime. In 1810 his double was reportedly seen in London by Sir Robert Peel, an old school friend, and others.

In a letter to his friend John Murray, Byron recorded how Peel told him "… he met me, as he thought in St James' Street, but we passed without speaking. He mentioned this, and it was denied as impossible; I being then in Turkey." Peel saw the shade of the poet again a few days later, pointing it out to his brother a person on the opposite side of the street, and saying "There, is the man whom I took for Byron." His brother instantly answered, "Why it is Byron, and no one else." Reportedly, Byron was also seen by others (stories grew to the point of Byron being witnessed writing his name down among the inquirers after the health of King George III, then attacked by insanity). Yet at this point, as Byron relates, "I was ill of a *strong fever* at Patras, caught in the marshes near Olympia, from the *malaria*. If I had died there, this would have been a new ghost story." The poet cited the Roman writer Lucretius, "who denies the immortality of the Soul – but asserts that from the 'flying off' of the Surfaces of bodies perpetually, these surfaces or cases like the coats of an onion are sometimes seen entire… I do

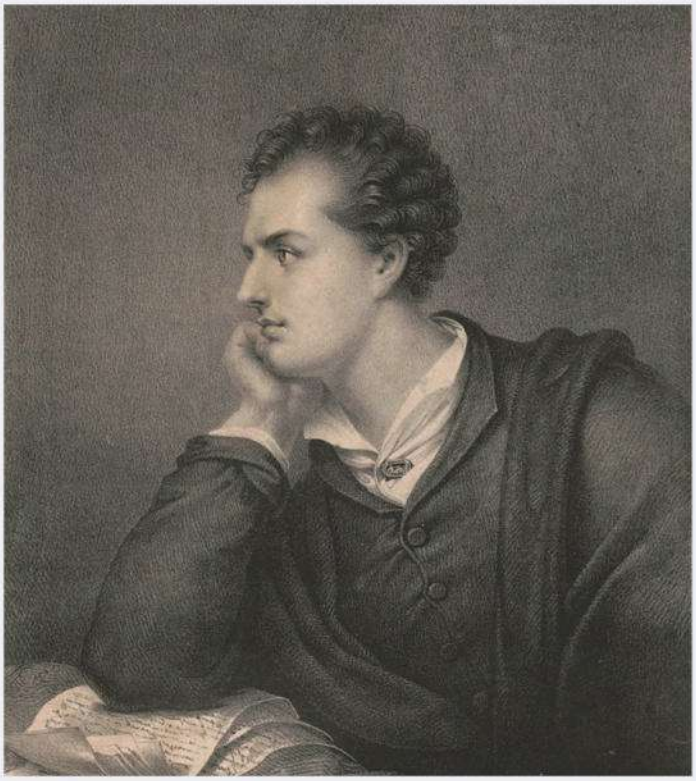
not disbelieve that we may be two."

This was a forerunner of the crisis apparitions that were widely collected later in the 19th century; or an example of the out-of-body-experience or in Spiritualist terms 'astral projection' whereby a person's double is seen (see **FT409:18-20**). Byron's final sardonic comment was: "I only hope that t'other me behaves like a Gentleman". (Letter Byron to Murray, from Ravenna, 6 Oct 1820, NLS Ms.43490).

This occurred four years before Byron departed from England, leaving behind the crumbling Abbey as a playground for ghosts. The site was bought in 1818 for £95,000 by Byron's former school friend Colonel Thomas Wildman, who then was forced to spend even more upon repairs. His extraordinary outlay ensured the survival of the mansion and attached monastic remains which once formed part of an Augustinian priory (not an actual Abbey) occupied by an order known as the Austin Canons.

The groundwork establishing the basic set of Newstead's ghosts thereafter was undertaken by the sceptical American diplomat and weaver of legends Washington Irving for his book *Abbotsford and Newstead* (1836,1856). He recognised it at once as a place "guaranteed to breed all kinds of fancies in the minds of its inmates if poetically, or superstitiously inclined".

Irving undertook to interview Wildman, his servants and locals and learned all about what have become its most famous ghosts, the cowled Black Monk or 'Goblin Friar', its White Lady and the returning shade of the second Lord Byron, Sir John the little with the Great Beard' (1526-1600) who was said to step out of his portrait after dark. These were crystallised by John Ingram in *Haunted Homes and Family Traditions* (1884) with a success adjudged by the fact how over a century later parties were crossing the Atlantic and heading to visit Newstead on ghost tours of Great Britain at £2,000 a head (*Psychic News*, 25 Nov 1989).



LEFT: An engraved portrait of Lord Byron. **BELOW**: Byron's old school friend Colonel Thomas Wildman, who bought Newstead Abbey in 1818.

Byron decorated his bedchamber with skulls and adapted one as a drinking vessel

To Lord Byron the Black Monk was an ancestral ghost, a hooded form attaching to his family line the grant of the Abbey to his ancestor Sir John Byron by Henry VIII in 1540. The poet acknowledged it as a warning of death and disaster, mentioning in the closing cantos of his epic *Don Juan* how:

Amundeville is Lord by day,
But the monk is Lord by night;
Nor wine nor wassail could raise a vassal
To question that Friar's right

Byron himself claimed a sighting before his ill-fated marriage to Anne Milbanke.

Though designated a family ghost, a case may be made that Byron triggered the haunting by digging up the Abbey floors. Former servant Nanny Smith told Washington Irving how: "Lord Byron took a notion there was a deal of money buried about the Abbey by the monks in old times". Disappointingly, only stone coffins full of bones lay beneath the cloister flagstones. Byron decorated his bedchamber with skulls and adapted one as a drinking vessel and celebrated in a dedicatory ode "Lines inscribed Upon a Cup formed from a Skull" in which a spirit reflects, "I lived, I loved and quaffed like you."

If this was not sufficient to awaken the dead, Byron with a friend, Charles Skinner Matthew, then took to playing at monks, after obtaining robes from a masquerade warehouse. "We were a company of some seven or eight, with an occasional neighbour or so for visitors, and used to sit up late in our friars' dresses, drinking burgundy, claret, champagne, and what not, out of the skull-cup, and all sorts of glasses, and buffooning all around the house, in our conventual garments". (Byron to John Murray, from Ravenna, 19 Nov 1820).

Such antics and ghoulish displays upset the female servants. Nervousness proved contagious and persistent, with Irving noting: "They even fear to sleep alone and will scarce venture at night on any distant errand about the Abbey unless they go in couples." Concerning the skulls, Nanny Smith recalled: "If I glanced an eye at them, they all seemed to grin, which I believe skulls always do. I can't say but I was glad to get out of the room."

She also spoke of repeatedly hearing heavy footsteps "like the tramp of a horse" approaching the fireplace in the great hall and one of the stone coffins with bones preserved inside. Irving eagerly explained this away, proclaiming hearers were "deceived by some peculiar effect of sound", commenting that "noises are propagated about a huge irregular edifice of the kind in a

ALAN MURDIE

ABOVE: Newstead Abbey today. **BELOW**: A portrait of "Sir John Byron the little with the grey beard", whose ghost has reportedly been seen in the Abbey.

very deceptive manner; footsteps are prolonged and reverberated by the vaulted cloisters and echoing halls; the creaking and slamming of distant gates, the rushing of the blast through the groves and among the ruined arches of the chapel, have all a strangely delusive effect at night."

After a keeper's wife spoke of seeing two ghosts standing in a dark portion of the cloisters opposite the chapel, and a third in the garden by the lord's well, and a cousin of Byron, Miss Kitty (or Sally) Parkins testified to meeting the monk (and even sketching it), Irving hit upon a forerunner of psychological expectancy theories as the explanation, maintaining the melancholic atmosphere, long echoing corridors and the antique armour and portraits all combined to adversely stimulate the nerves of residents and servants to the point of hallucination. In particular, "partly through old tradition, and partly through the influence of Lord Byron's rhymes" everyone became more susceptible to seeing the monk, to the point it was "... threatening to hold possession so long as the old edifice shall endure."

Such traditions easily survived another sceptic, Augusta Zelia Webb (1857-1925) the daughter of William Webb, a big game hunter, who purchased Newstead from Wildman in 1861. In her memoir of childhood, *Livingstone and Newstead* (1913), she also attributed manifestations to a mix of suggestion, ivy knocking against windows and staff gossip (under her authoritarian father and mother servants risked dismissal if they mentioned ghosts). Despite believing in them as a child she never encountered anything uncanny or felt the least perturbed walking the corridors by night. However, she gave uneasy credit to accounts of two floating cloud-like forms, one white and one black, seen hovering in the Abbey.

Irving's assessment of the durability of the Black Monk proved true for many years, demonstrated by further accruals of lore. Three chilling and heavily embroidered stories (or more probably outright inventions) emerged in ghost hunter Elliot O'Donnell's posthumous collection *The Midnight Hearse* (1965) edited by Harry Ludlam). Like so many of O'Donnell's own claimed sightings, these were alleged encounters by solitary witnesses.

The first, sometime during the 18th century, has a touch of MR James, introducing a 'haunted chamber', a moonlit night and a scoffing guest armed with a pistol. His gun proves no defence at the moment the ghost, the outline

of a monk with cowl and beads, manifests with "a countenance the very opposite of saintly". He finds himself petrified with fear, or perhaps wracked with what today would be dubbed an attack of sleep paralysis. This enables the form to glide to the bedside unhindered, bend over and thrust its face into his.

Fortunately, the apparition withdraws, chuckling horribly, and amalgamates with the moonbeams and vanishes. Soon afterwards, a member of the Byron family (unnamed) dies…

O'Donnell's second story again features the monk exposing its "ghastly white face and two, hollow lurid eyes" to a terrified village lass waiting for her sweetheart, causing her to faint away. This occurred in 1824 and just "a few days later the whole country rang with the news of Byron's death".

The third encounter "at a much later date" involves a monk-like figure with the face of a skull and radiating hostility, which was observed by a farmer driving a cart near the park gates late one night, a sighting followed by someone closely linked with the Byron family dying in the district soon afterwards.

Thereafter, reliable manifestations seemingly evaporated as Newstead's connection with the Byrons faded into history. In 1953 came belated reports of the monk haunting Woodside Cottage near the Abbey, though amounting merely to unexplained footsteps heard by a Mr and Mrs Taylor (*Psychic News*, 1 Aug 1953). In 1987 Len Moakes in his *Haunted Nottinghamshire* reported an account circulating about a doctor spotting a mysterious hooded figure in the grounds, and a similar report from a poacher. Moakes found the doctor untraceable and though he succeeded in contacting the poacher, the man insisted on anonymity for obvious reasons.

Unfortunately, one historically irreconcilable and undermining element impinging on the reliability of all sightings of the monk (including from the poet) is that the original Canons of Newstead wore biretta hats rather than hoods or cowls.

Similarly, there have been no reports for at least a century and a half of the fifth Lord Byron, uncle of the poet and known as 'wicked Byron', riding out in a coach on stormy nights. Stories of 'Sir John Byron the little with the great beard' appearing seated in a chair in the great hall reading a book have circulated for generations, but no names of witnesses are provided.

In the early 19th century, a young lady, and a cousin to the poet, sleeping in one of the Abbey's bedrooms awoke to see a lady in white coming out of the wall on one side of the room and disappearing into the opposite wall.

ALAN MURDIE

ABOVE: Like many reputedly haunted sites, Newstead Abbey has its own White Lady, who has been spotted standing and shimmering at the nearby bus stop.

The third encounter involved a monk-like figure with the face of a skull radiating hostility

This ties up with long standing traditions of a White Lady, a dainty 'fairy-like' figure, drifting through the grounds and neighbourhood. This White Lady seems most likely to have been a real 19th century woman, mentioned by Irving and nicknamed 'Sophie' by servants at the house. According to Irving, she was an eccentric deaf mute who lived in a cottage in the grounds. However, I wonder if she was simply a woman suffering from acute shyness, an example of the obsessive and introverted female literary fan who finds a more fulfilling existence within the pages of books than in daily life. Immersed in Byron's verses, she wandered the grounds like a lovelorn soul, dreaming of the poet and composing her own verses. Hiding from approaching strangers, even diving into thickets to avoid any contact, on several occasions she was mistaken for a ghost, an impression strengthened by her extreme shyness and refusal to communicate. From this the legend of the White Lady arose (at one time the café was named after her and one path is still known as White Lady's Walk).

Tales of appearances are still current in 2024, with claims of her being glimpsed on winter nights along the road running through the park, materialising at the tall entrance gates and even standing shimmering by the modern bus stop outside!

STRANGE CONTINENT

ULRICH MAGIN rounds up the Euro-weirdness, from mad weather and bad cows to a BVM beheading

HEAVY WEATHER

This summer has been one marked by natural disasters throughout Europe. We had an earthquake in Montenegro, a quake of magnitude 3.1 in Friuli, Italy, floods in Germany and Switzerland, landslides in the Misox Valley, Switzerland, in June and at Lake Garda and in Vorarlberg, Austria, at the end of July, record-breaking temperatures in Greece and Spain with the highest possible heat warning in Rome, Florence and Bologna in Italy. Weather extremes have become common, and floods caused by heavy rains continued in central Europe all through July. There was geophysical turmoil as well: in July, the Sicilian volcanoes Etna and Stromboli both erupted, with Stromboli suffering one of the most violent eruptions of recent years. Then, Etna again erupted spectacularly on 4 August. *L'Arena, 18 July; Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger, 6+20 July; ZDF heute, 4 Aut 2024.*

BAD BEARS (AND COWS)

A brown bear wounded five people on 17 March in the town of Liptovski Mikulas in Slovakia. The animal strolled through the town (population 30,000), became stressed by all the cars and people and was looking for an escape route, thereby injuring passers-by. As environmental minister Tomas Taraba told the press, the animal was later tracked and shot. *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger, 28 March 2024.*

In July 2024, a brown bear attacked and killed a 19-year-old woman in front of her husband. The couple had hiked to the Spumoasa waterfall near Jepii Mici in the southern Carpathians, in Romania, when the bear grabbed the woman by the leg and dragged her away. Her dead body was later recovered in a ravine, and police tracked the bear and destroyed it. About 8,000 bears live in Romania, the second largest European population after the one in Russia. *web.de, 10 July 2024.* About 100 bears live in South Tyrol, Northern Italy, and a 47-year-old French jogger was attacked there when one of the animals grabbed him by his arms and legs on 16 July 2024. *RTL Nachrichten, 16 July 2024.*

Bears are dangerous – and so are cows. At the end of June 2024, a 40-year-old mother died in front of her children after being attacked by a herd of cows in the Gasteiner valley in the federal state of Salzburg, Austria. One of her daughters was also severely injured. Herds of cows are prone to attack people who stray into their grazing grounds, and hikers should always look out for signs of aggression. *T-Online.de, 28 June 2024.*

XINHUA / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOE: Sicily's Stromboli volcano spewing ashes over the island in July this year.

In July, the volcanoes Etna and Stromboli both erupted

Last year, on 16 July 2023, a group of tourists was attacked by cattle and a woman injured on the Seiser Alm, a high pasture in South Tyrol, Italy. The next day, on 17 July, a couple from Trentino hiking at Moos (!) in Passeier, also in South Tyrol, were crossing a meadow on their way around Lake Seeber when they came across several cows at a height of 2,000m (6,560ft). Initially, the cows were peaceful, but this suddenly changed. Some 10 cows started to surround "a man and a child", which frightened other hikers on the path, as the couple explained. There were no dogs in the vicinity, and the cows started to charge at the couple who took refuge on a rock. Then the cows started to chase another couple further away. The couple slowly made their way back down into the valley, using a path where there were no cattle. *merkur.de, 25 July 2023.*

MUSICAL GHOSTS?

On 3am on 20 March, police were called to the music school at the Benediktinerplatz in Konstanz, on Lake Constance at the border between Germany and Switzerland. A newspaper delivery man had reported the main doors were wide open, and police who searched the building noticed the lights of torches on the second floor.

Police asked for reinforcement and found that an emergency exit door on the second floor was not locked. Said Katrin Rosenthal, press spokesperson for the police: "We do not know if or how somebody entered the building." No traces of an attempted burglary were discovered and no intruder located. There was no damage of any kind.

The head of the music school, Dieter Dörrenbächer, was puzzled. "When staff arrived in the morning, the doors were locked. But you cannot just close them, you need a key to lock them. This is a very strange story. Nothing was damaged or stolen. On Monday morning, the room where drum lessons take place was found in an unusual condition. The drums have obviously been moved. Cymbals lay on the floor. It's all a bit strange, I have never experienced anything like that before. The events

are inexplicable, really a bit mysterious. We will follow up with the employees to see if anyone has noticed anything. We want to get to the bottom of the matter." *suedkurier.de, 21 Mar 2024.*

SIGNS AND WONDERS

The Vatican's new guidelines for the evaluation of miracles, visions and miracle cures (**FT446:5-6, 448:21**) have returned to the news. The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith has now voiced a positive opinion on the apparitions of Our Lady of Montichiari in the village of Fontanelle near Brescia, Italy. The letter of approval was sent to Bishop Pierantonio Tremolada, with the endorsement of Pope Francis. In this village, the seeress Pierina Gilli said she had received messages from the Maria Rosa Mystica (Mary of the Mystical Rose) in 1947 and 1966. In the latter year, the Madonna indicated the location of a spring and said it was a place of purification and source of graces. The positive assessment, however, is not based on some sort of fortean investigation, but only concerns the visionary and her messages: her humility and "the correct concept of God" in the texts. As nothing in the private revelations contradicts Catholic doctrine, and as long as the worship is directed to God, not to the seeress or the Madonna, people may now pray at the site. However, the Dicastery still stresses "that some expressions in Gilli's diaries require interpretation, particularly those depicting the Madonna as a mediator restraining divine justice and punishments."

In another evaluation, the Vatican judged the Marian visions of Ida Peedermanns, who spoke 56 times between 1945 and 1959 with the "Lady of all People" in Amsterdam, as "constat de non supranaturalitate" (not supernatural) and voiced a "negative" verdict, confirming a conclusion that had already been reached in 1974 by Pope Paul VI. *katholisch.de, 8 July; vaticannews.va, 8+11 July 2024.*

ULRICH KEHRER / DIOCESE OF LINZ

LEFT: Esther Strauss's sculpture of the BVM giving birth was exhibited in Linz's St Mary's Cathedral where it was found beheaded on 1 July.

BVM BEHEADED

Meanwhile, a realistic wooden figure called *Crowning* by artist Esther Strauss shows Mary, the Mother of God, sitting on a rock and giving birth – with her legs spread, just like any other woman in labour. It was intended to open up a new exhibition exploring concepts of the incarnation in St Mary's Cathedral, Linz, Austria. However, in the early hours of the morning of 1 July, some vandals sawed off Mary's head. "Whoever removed the head of the sculpture did it very brutally. This shows that there are still people who question women's rights to their own bodies. We have to take a decisive stand against this," the artist said, stressing that hers was one of the few images of the BVM made by a woman, not a man.

The statue was created and erected with the full consent of the Catholic Church. Johann Hintermaier, Episcopal Vicar for Education, Art and Culture, expressed his dismay: "We were aware that we would provoke discussions with this installation. If we have hurt people's religious feelings, we are sorry, but I strongly condemn this violent act of destruction and the refusal of dialogue as well as the attack on the freedom of art." *katholisch.de, 2 July 2024.*

100 YEARS AGO

A century ago, in a time of major scientific discoveries, reports on all sorts of exciting breakthroughs that sometimes weren't filled newspaper columns.

In 1895, the French physicist René Blondlot of the University of Nancy believed he had discovered 'N-rays' within X-rays. Their existence was initially confirmed by others, but subsequently found to be illusory. In 1924, researchers still believed in them and used them for all kinds of fortean explanations:

"A Parisian engineer, Georg Lakbovsky, has just announced the discovery of new mysterious rays emitted by animals: 'Many years ago I began to study animals and soon arrived at the conclusion that the often used and abused word 'instinct' only serves to cover up our ignorance. I found more and more evidence that the amazing properties of animals called "instinct" are reflections of emanations that the animals are able to sense and absorb. […] Only this can explain why migratory birds find the right route across the ocean by picking up invisible and infinitely short waves. Only this talent explains the mysterious certainty with which animals travel thousands and thousands of miles without getting lost… Irresistibly attracted by the waves that flow from their prey, predators and birds of prey attack their victims with unfailing force. The old hypothesis that animals use their hearing or their fabulous sense of smell has long been recognised as false. However, to date it has not been possible to solve the mystery. I believe I have found the key to this secret. It has long been proven that certain insects have tiny antennæ. Nature doesn't do anything without a purpose. What would these antennas be used for if not to pick up invisible waves? Why do certain birds turn their beaks against the wind? How do fish and polyps that have no eyes find food in the ocean? All these questions can only be answered by the mentioned hypothesis. The idea of human emanations first appeared in the books of the naturalist Blondlot. I believe that I will soon be able to go far beyond theory and put this idea into practical reality. This opens up a perspective for medicine and technology that not even the boldest novelists could have dreamed of. For example, one could use these waves to diagnose all diseases with mathematical certainty, and without the help of a radio everyone will be able to talk to their fellow human beings at a distance of a thousand miles. Yes, I believe we would even understand the language of animals.'" *Solinger Tageblatt, 9 Oct 1924.*

KARL SHUKER brings news of an unseen thylacine photo and a deceased doomsday fish

UNSEEN THYLACINE

Hot on the heels (or hooves!) of some lately rediscovered, hitherto long-lost photographs snapped way back in 1864 of a captive living quagga *Equus quagga quagga* at a South African farm, documented by me recently here in my Alien Zoo, comes some equally exciting photographic news regarding the thylacine (Tasmanian wolf/tiger) *Thylacinus cynocephalus*. This large, striped, wolf-like marsupial officially became extinct in 1936 when the last confirmed specimen died at Hobart Zoo (though countless unconfirmed sightings in the wild have subsequently been and continue to be reported). Of the 119 currently-known photographs and 13 videos of thylacines, all of them depict living captive specimens or dead wild ones. No picture of a living wild specimen was thought to exist, but a remarkable new disclosure may disprove that received wisdom.

The last confirmed wild thylacine was an individual shot in 1930 at Trowutta by Tasmanian farmer Wilfred Batty. Several photos of the dead thylacine are known to exist, the most famous one portraying its carcase propped up against a fence with a kneeling Batty and his dog posing alongside it. Now, however, an additional, previously undocumented photo of that particular specimen has been revealed, and what makes this one so potentially significant – even unique – is that judging from the thylacine's standing position in it, the animal, though badly wounded, may have still been alive at that point in time.

This photo was made public on 5 July 2024, after being brought to the attention of Yahoo News by its present owner, Tania Turner, 59. She had received it during the early 1980s from her grandfather Montague Turner, who died 10 years later, but had once owned the Punchbowl Zoo in Launceston, Tasmania. He in turn had probably been given it by his father, Montague Turner Senior, with whom as a boy he would go hunting for thylacines, back when this species definitely still survived on the island. So her grandfather had actually seen thylacines alive in the wild state. Moreover, because each thylacine specimen had a distinct stripe pattern as unique as a human fingerprint, by carefully comparing the specific striping of the thylacine in Tania Turner's photograph with that of the thylacine shot by Batty and depicted in the known photos of it, experts at Tasmanian Tiger Archives, who seek and preserve pictorial evidence of thylacines, have confirmed that the two photographed thylacines are indeed one and the same individual. Even so, what bitter irony it is that what might be the first known photo of a living wild thylacine may also depict the last known living wild thylacine, snapped just moments before it too died. *https://au.news.yahoo.com/rare-photograph-of-tasmanian-tiger-triggers-warning-from-families-connected-to-its-extinction-210812983; https://au.news.yahoo.com/unseen-photos-of-tasmanian-tigers-spark-wonderful-hope-more-could-be-discovered-212721914.html*

THE SCRIPPS INSTITUTION OF OCEANOGRAPHY

ABOVE LEFT: The newly discovered thylacine photo. **ABOVE RIGHT:** Researchers and science-minded snorkellers recover a dead oarfish from La Jolla Cove, California, in August.

DOOMSDAY SERPENT FISH AHOY!

One of life's few certainties is that it is impossible to over-estimate the imaginative powers of media headline writers. And so it proved yet again when a giant oarfish *Regalecus glesne* was recently spotted floating in shallow waters off California. This famously lengthy, sinuous marine species, up to 30ft (9m) long (possibly more) and sporting a blood-red mane-like dorsal fin befitting some dread apocalyptic sea stallion, is widely believed responsible for a fair few sightings of alleged sea serpents down through the centuries. For although typically remaining out of human sight, a denizen of fairly deep, mesopelagic waters, occasionally a specimen will rise to the surface, especially during disturbed meteorological conditions, such as storms or earth/seaquakes. It may even be washed ashore, where its spectacular appearance never fails to arouse wonder – and not a little superstitious fear – among some laypeople eyewitnesses, who wrongly believe that this extremely large but wholly harmless fish is somehow a harbinger or even an inducer of earthquakes and other natural disasters.

So it was during the second weekend in August 2024, when a 12ft (3.7m)-long giant oarfish was discovered floating on the sea surface in La Jolla Cove, just north of downtown San Diego, by some snorkelers and kayakers. Sadly, this magnificent marine beast was dead, but its unexpected surfacing may have been caused by powerful tremors emanating from the 5.2-magnitude earthquake that had been felt across much of southern California just a week earlier, on 6 August. Ironically, therefore, far from causing earthquakes, it seems likely that this giant oarfish specimen had actually been indirectly killed by one. Notwithstanding that, the media soon coined a nothing if not memorable moniker for this tragic creature (as if 'giant oarfish' wasn't distinctive enough), dubbing it the Doomsday serpent fish! Loathe as I am to admit it, I have to confess that I do rather like this name!

As for the specimen itself, its body was carefully brought ashore and then transported to the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in San Diego. Here it will be studied to determine its precise cause of death, and then retained in the Institution's huge collection of ichthyological material – a suitably dignified final resting place, certainly, even for a Doomsday serpent fish! *www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13749089/Doomsday-serpent-fish-spotted-snorkelers-California-coast.html*

ANIMAL DOCTORS

New research suggests that orangutans self-medicate and ants perform life-saving surgery on injured nest-mates

ISABELLE LAUMER

ABOVE: *Fibraurea tinctoria*, or *akar kuning* leaves. An orangutan was observed chwing the leaves and applying the resulting paste to a wound on his face. **BELOW:** An Injured Florida carpenter ant (marked in yellow) receives wound care from a nestmate.

ORANGUTAN, HEAL THYSELF

Dr Isabella Laumer from the Max Planck Institute in Germany has recorded the first evidence of a creature in the wild treating an injury with a medicinal plant. Members of her team were working in the Gunung Leuser National Park, Indonesia, when they spotted Rakus, a male Sumatran orangutan, applying a paste of leaves to a large wound on his cheek, which they believe he received fighting another male. He was chewing the stem and leaves of plant called *akar kuning*, known to have anti-inflammatory and anti-bacterial properties, then smearing the pulp of chewed leaves onto the wound until it was fully covered.

The team kept Rakus under observation and saw that the wound showed no sign of infection and closed within five days. After a month, it was fully healed. The scientists concluded that Rakus was deliberately medicating himself as orangutans rarely eat *akar kuning* and because of the care he was taking. "He repeatedly applied the paste, and he later also applied more solid plant matter. The entire process lasted really a considerable amount of time – that's why we think that he intentionally applied it," explained Laumer. They also saw Rakus resting for much longer than usual, suggesting he was taking time to recuperate from his injury.

Laumer was unclear as to whether Rakus had learned the healing technique from other orangs or discovered it for himself. "It could be that he accidentally touched his wound with his finger that had the plant on it. And then because the plant has quite potent pain-relieving substances, he might have felt immediate pain relief, which made him apply it again and again," she said. Chimps, too, have long been suspected of self-medicating but it has only recently been confirmed.

Dr Elodie Freymann, from the University of Oxford, spent four years closely observing sick or injured chimps in Budongo Central Forest Reserve in Uganda, and found that many sought out unusual plants that they did not normally eat. Freymann had these analysed and discovered that most had antibacterial properties. "Of course, we can't 100% prove that any of these cases were a direct result of eating these resources," she said, "But it highlights the medicinal knowledge that can be gained from observing other species in the wild and underscores the urgent need to preserve these 'forest pharmacies' for future generations." *BBC News, 2 May, 21 Jun 2024.*

ANT SURGERY

It doesn't require the sophistication of primates to carry out medical interventions – ants have been found to do it too. Florida carpenter ants (*Camponotus floridanus*) have been discovered carrying out life-saving surgery on injured nest mates, cleaning wounds and amputating severely damaged limbs.

Erik Frank, a behavioural ecologist at the University of Würzburg in Germany, who carried out the research, said: "When we're talking about amputation behaviour, this is literally the only case in which a sophisticated and systematic amputation of an individual by another member of its species occurs in the animal kingdom." Frank's team found that the ants treated injuries to the femur – the upper part of the ants' leg – by cleaning the wound with their mouths before amputating the leg by repeatedly biting it, while wounds on the tibia – the lower leg – were treated with just cleaning.

They found that the survival rates for ants with femur injuries improved from less than 40% to between 90 and 95% when amputations were carried out, and that survival rates for tibia injuries improved from 15% to 75% following cleaning. The researchers believe that the ants only amputate for the more severe femur injuries because of time constraints, as each amputation takes ants at least 40 minutes to complete. "The ants are able to diagnose a wound, see if it's infected or sterile, and treat it accordingly over long periods of time by other individuals – the only medical system that can rival that would be the human one," Frank said. *livescience.com, 2 Jul 2024.*

CURRENT BIOLOGY

THE CONSPIRASPHERE

As the 23rd anniversary of 9/11 passes, **NOEL ROONEY** finds that the only recent developments in conspiracy theory concerning the attack come from a surprising and disturbing quarter

REMEMBRANCE AND FORGETTING

We have just passed the 23rd anniversary of 9/11. Since 23 is a number dear and strange to the hearts and minds of many a fortean, I thought I'd have a look at what was on offer by way of remembrance in the Conspirasphere. My expectations were low; I assumed that, with all that has happened and is happening since, the event and its ramifications would be fairly marginalised. In fact, I found something a little more interesting.

Over the intervening years, positions have tended to solidify. This in itself is not surprising; it's a typical response to historical events viewed through specific lenses. How they have solidified is the interesting point here. I thought I would find commentary on George Bush and Dick Cheney (where are they now?) and equally stuff on Osama bin Laden and the legacy of Al Qaida.

There is a certain amount of such material out there and much of it is, at this point, more an exercise in antagonistic nostalgia than a development in the theory base. Three other features of recent commentary stood out for me: first, that an event that literally shook the world a relatively short time ago is in the main a niche interest now; second, that the overall blame has shifted over time in the view of the majority of conspiracists, or at least those disposed to write or upload video content; and third, that the status, both from internal and external views, of the conspiracies and their proponents has changed.

The speed at which the majority of us forget, and the sheer amount of things that we forget, over a short stretch of time is extraordinary. Generally, the things we remember are those that the

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Conspiracists tend to follow the news cycle like the rest of us

state (in this case acting as representative of society as much as overseer of it) wants us to remember; those events that are marked by state memorials, by retrospective journalism, or by history lessons conducted via various media. There is nothing sinister about this process per se; it's the eternal jostling between the current of history and the tsunami of the news cycle in many respects.

I am surprised, however, by the fairly low-key mainstream attitude to 9/11. An event whose ramifications still adumbrate politics, conflict and migration across much of the world has been consigned to the backwaters of history. Lots of news outlets got through the day without mentioning the event at all. Some featured memorial services but these had the feel of Remembrance Day in sentiment. Perhaps most oddly of all, most conspiracist platforms were equally blasé about it.

In the years immediately following the tragedy, most commentators sought for the causal origins of 9/11 in the US. Both the LIHOP and MIHOP (let it happen versus made it happen) camps focused on the Bush government, the Neo-con element in the state apparatus, or the deep state itself. There were other points of view but these belonged to minority opinion.

There were, of course, dark mutterings about the involvement of foreign powers in the attack; Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Israel came under scrutiny, alongside less plausibly elective villains such as Iraq. The main thrust of sceptical investigations, however, was in lockstep with the mainstream, and looked primarily at the US and Afghanistan – and more specifically the Al Qaida presence there.

What struck me in my (admittedly cursory) survey of recent content was that the onus of guilt has now, for some of those still active in 9/11 lore, shifted decisively towards Israel. The dancing Israelis; the performance art in the towers; the identity of people closely associated with events; these elements have come to the fore. Perhaps this is an artefact of more recent events that have put Israel in the media spotlight (for all their declared dissent, conspiracists tend to follow the news cycle just like the rest of us).

And perhaps not. I suspect that, as theories mature and meld into the grand narrative, the incentive to include Israel as a bad actor grows. This is not a reflection of real-world events or processes. Rather, it is a feature of the grand narrative. Or to put it another way: when the main C-sphere takes its collective eye off a particular ball, others keep running with it; and those others are adherents of a worldview that sees things in a very particular way.

These are folks who see the Protocols as legitimate and real. They see the banking world as a cartel run by the Rothschilds. They understand the current world as the result of an ongoing Jewish conspiracy. They generally declare themselves merely anti-Zionist, although a few are open about being anti-Semitic. How did these people come to be the innovators in 9/11 studies?

The answer, partly, lies in my third observation. The 9/11 truther movement has grown up; it has passed from a loose collective of dissenting voices to something more fixed, organised and collegiate. Various bodies have their own offices and brands; they organise conferences and publish books. And as they have settled, so has their narrative. It is rare to see a member of this group look outside the story that has, for them, become the official account.

And that has left a space that has been filled by a very specific type of grand narrative conspiracy theorist. Whether this is a process that happens to all conspiracy theories, I don't quite know; but I do have the deadening sense that at least some of them inevitably end up in the grasp of people who are motivated as much by deeply assimilated hatred as any dispassionate hankering after an elusive truth. And that cannot help but undermine the project of conspiracy theory for good or ill.

IT TAKES ALL SORTS

From simulated sex with a statue of Bacchus in Italy to unwise congress with a cow in Thailand

ABOVE LEFT: The female tourist who got jiggy with a statue of Bacchus in Florence to widespread condemnation. **ABOVE RIGHT:** A stark naked Evgenii Kuvshinov, a Russian visitor to Thailand, is removed by paramedics after his ill-advised attempt to have sex with a cow ended with injuries to his bottom.

ORGIASTIC RITES AND WRONGS

There was widespread condemnation of the actions of a female visitor to Florence, Italy, who could be seen in images shared on the Welcome to Florence social media account kissing and rubbing herself in a sexual manner against a statue of Bacchus in the city. The statue, a modern replica of a 16th century work by sculptor Giambologna, stands on a street corner near the Ponte Vecchio bridge in the city, while the original is now in the nearby Bargello museum. Patrizia Asproni, the president of Confcultura, an association promoting Italy's cultural heritage, said that these "repeated shows of rudeness and barbarity" take place "because everyone feels entitled to do whatever they want with impunity". As the statue is of Bacchus, the Roman god of wine and excess, including the sexual variety, the woman's behaviour could arguably be seen as reverence and worship. *BBC News, 17 Jul 2024.*

FISHY BEHAVIOUR

One of the latest rejuvenation fads among fans of cosmetic surgery is for women to have salmon sperm injected into their vaginas. Costing $500 per treatment, the so-called 'O-Shot' reportedly rejuvenates the organ and improves sex lives, allegedly showing positive results after two to four sessions.

"A lot of older women come to me and say they are not having any kind of sexual arousal anymore," said æsthetic nurse Amanda Azzopardi. "So, we do the 'O-shot' and they're reporting stronger and more frequent orgasms, increased natural lubrication, greater sexual arousal." Popular in Korea for many years, the treatment gained widespread fame after actor Jennifer Aniston reported that she had received a salmon-sperm facial. According to a 2010 study published in the *International Journal of Cosmetic Science*, DNA in salmon sperm contained higher water content, improved skin elasticity, produced stronger collagen levels and increased production of hyaluronic acid.

Meanwhile, Catherine June, 58, from Hobart, Tasmania, ended up in court facing three charges under the Classifications Enforcement Act (Publications, Films and Computer Games), after a video she made with her partner Ashley Hallam, 55, went viral. The video allegedly showed Hallam committing a sex act on June with a live brown trout during a fishing trip and earned June the unfortunate media nickname "Tassie Trout Lady". *nypost.com, 22 Apr; News.com.au, 19 Aug 2024.*

WOAH NELLY!

In Hildago County, Texas, Rangers were called in by the Southwest Cattle Raiser Association after several horse owners found benches and chairs left in their animals' stalls. They arrested Cirilo Castillo when he was seen acting suspiciously on CCTV installed by one owner to monitor a pregnant mare in his stables. The horse owner had spotted someone lying on the floor of the horse stalls, and when he went over to the stables he saw a masked man standing on a chair behind the mare, "fumbling with his pants". The man fled, but authorities were able to identify him as Castillo. He had previously been arrested for having sex with a horse in 2013, and again in 2015 when he was found lying in a barn with a serious leg injury having been kicked by a horse. Castillo had attempted to explain this away by claiming that he had been hit by a car and had crawled to the barn to find shelter. Former Hidalgo County Sheriff Lupe Trevino said, "He is going to continue to do this. The people there in the neighborhood are just sick and tired of it, we just need to do something with this," while the owners of the mare he assaulted said they were going to have a vet check the horse over as there were "defects" in the foal that was subsequently born. *valleycentral.com, 22 Apr 2022.*

COWABUNGABUNGA

While Thailand has a reputation as a destination for sex tourism, few visiting the country are seeking the kind of encounter that 26-year-old Evgenii Kuvshinov, from Russia, seemed to be looking for.

Spotted in a field in Ban Na Derm, Surat Thani Province, after locals were alerted by his cries, he was naked and being aggressively gored by a cow. Witnesses said they had seen him climb into the field and strip off, then sidle up to a bull before turning his attention to the cow, which was tied to a wooden fence, trying to mount her sexually. The cow reacted violently, turning on Kuvshinov, pinning him to the ground and goring him.

Having seen him wandering naked in the field, locals had already called police, who tried to drive the cow off, but they were unable to reach him. They called the cow's owner to calm the animal and eventually extracted Kuvshinov with wounds to his bottom and abrasions all over his body. Paramedics took him to hospital, but astoundingly his injuries were not severe, and he discharged himself and immediately returned to Russia. Police suspect drugs were involved. *aseannow.com, 15 Aug; Dailymail.co.uk, 16 Aug 2024.*

FORTEAN FOLLOW-UPS

Updates on stories covered in previous issues of FT, including scary chilli chips and a BVM scam

ABOVE: The Bonnacon's 'defensive defecation'. **BELOW:** Brocarde and her new friend, a supposedly possessed clown doll.

ORCA TROUBLE [FT446:7]

The Australian sperm whales' strategy of 'defensive defecation' to drive off a pod of aggressive orcas is nothing new. The oldest known animal joke involves an animal with the same defence mechanism, to be found in a mediæval manuscript known as the Aberdeen Bestiary. "You have these very upright, moral stories about good animals and bad animals doing the right thing and the wrong thing," said Professor Anne Geddes of Aberdeen University. "And then you come to the Bonnacon." The mythical bull-like creature can be seen defending itself against two knights with "A gold leaf shower of manure coming out of its backside at high speed: it's his secret weapon – amazing flatulence. The knights are overcome by acid burns, heat and smell," said Geddes, adding, "There is no moral attached to this story whatsoever." *BBC News, 6 Mar 2024.*

Meanwhile, the White Gladis orca pod that has gained notoriety due to its repeated attacks on small boats in and around the Straits of Gibraltar seems to be getting more effective at actually sinking vessels. Having sent the 15 metre (49ft) *Alboran Cognac* to the bottom in May, in July they subjected the *Bonhomme William* to a relentless two-hour attack that ended with the £100,000 yacht sinking. Robert Powell, 59, had only just left Vilamoura, Portugal, and was 22 hours into a 10-day voyage to Greece when he and his crew encountered the whales. After the first impact, Powell assumed the boat had hit a rock but, he said, "Whilst I was looking around the boat to see if I could see anything it got hit again. On the second hit, I looked over the back of the boat, and I could see the dark shape of a killer whale in the water." The orcas started by focusing on the rudder, and when they had destroyed that they spread out and each concentrated on a different part of the hull. "They were circling. It was like watching wolves hunt," Powell said, "They were taking it in turns to come in — sometimes two would come in at the same time and hit it. So obviously pretty terrifying". Powell and his crew tried everything from dropping firecrackers in the water and turning off the engine to deter the attack, but the pod persisted and after an hour and a half of concentrated battering, the hull of the *Bonhomme William* finally split and water gushed in, causing the yacht to start sinking. Powell and the crew were rescued by a salvage vessel two hours later, just before the boat slid beneath the waves. Speaking to the press after his rescue, Powell said: "It's only a matter of time before someone shoots one of these killer whales." *nypost.com, 26 Jul 2024.*

SPICY CRISP DEATH [FT439:72]

The death of Harris Wolobah last year, after he ate a ferociously hot "One Chip Challenge" tortilla chip made with the legendary Carolina Reaper chilli, has done nothing to dampen the "super spicy" crisp craze. In July, 14 high school students in Tokyo ended up in hospital after eating crisps made with the potent "ghost pepper", grown in northeastern India, where it's known as *bhut jolokia*. Thirteen girls and one boy were taken to hospital after complaining of nausea and acute pain around the mouth, but recovered quickly after treatment.

The snack manufacturer, Isoyama Corp, whose website bristles with warnings about the crisps and "forbids" those under 18 from consuming them, apologised for "any inconvenience" to customers, and wished the students a swift recovery. Their site also advises people not to "eat the chips when they are alone" and says they could cause diarrhoea if eaten "excessively", adding that people with high blood pressure or weak stomachs "are absolutely prohibited" from eating the crisps. It also warns that if you have cuts on your fingers, you must be careful while opening the packets. *BBC News, 17 Jul 2024.*

SEXY SPIRIT SOLDIER [FT439:8-9]

Singer Brocarde, 40, who claims to have married, then divorced, the ghost of a Victorian soldier named Edwardo, accusing him of cheating on and then stalking her, is alleging her phantom ex is continuing to cause her problems. On a visit to the US, Brocarde "adopted" a possessed clown doll after "connecting" with him while spending a night at the famed Clown Motel in Nevada. Apparently, the spirit trapped inside the clown immediately revealed to Brocarde that he had been a carnival clown, but was a tortured soul, having spent his days performing for audiences that didn't care and who ridiculed him for not being funny. Having toured the US with the possessed clown, Brocarde returned home to Oxfordshire to conduct a paranormal investigation on him. However, she says that Edwardo is jealous of her new find: "I can instantly tell when Edwardo has a point to make, his energy is very powerful. He does not like

COURTESY OF BROCARDE / SWNS

INDEPENDENT PHOTO AGENCY SRL / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: Gisella Cardia and the BVM statue that supposedly wept bloody tears.

the clown… he watches him and I keep finding the clown by the door, subtlety is not Edwardo's strong point." Brocarde, though, says, "I have no intention of marrying a clown ghost, although that would be funny. The clown is here for research purposes only, and I definitely don't need to get into a paranormal love triangle." She added, "I know the clown is possessed, so perhaps Edwardo has picked up on some bad energy and is just looking out for me," although, she says, "So far, he's been a peaceful entity. He's often moving on his own, but nothing that would cause me alarm. I'm hoping that doesn't change now I have two ghosts in the house!" Brocarde is planning to launch a clown cam, so people can watch him in real time and report any paranormal activity. *walesonline.co.uk, 20 May 2024*

TREVIGNANO WEEPING VIRGIN [FT432:8, 448:21]

As suspected, one of the Vatican's first acts after introducing new rules for dealing with miracles (**FT446:4-5**) has been to declare the allegedly weeping statue of the Virgin Mary at Trevignano Romano, near Rome, to be "de non supernaturalitate", or "clearly not supernatural". This is one of the six categories to which alleged miracles can be assigned under the new rules, and the one which decisively dismisses the phenomenon as fake. The Trevignano "miracle" involved a statue of the Virgin that a Sicilian woman named Gisella Cardia bought at the Medjugorje pilgrimage site, which she claimed had been shedding tears of blood since 2016, as well as giving Cardia personal revelations and, on one occasion, causing the miraculous multiplication of leftover gnocchi to feed a crowd. Cardia's behaviour had long been causing concern to the Vatican and the local community, who were also tired of devotees descending on the town each month to venerate the statue, and one investigation of the statue had found that the blood type of the miraculous tears matched Cardia's own, while another identified it as pig's blood. *Catholicherald.co.uk, 28 Jun 2024.*

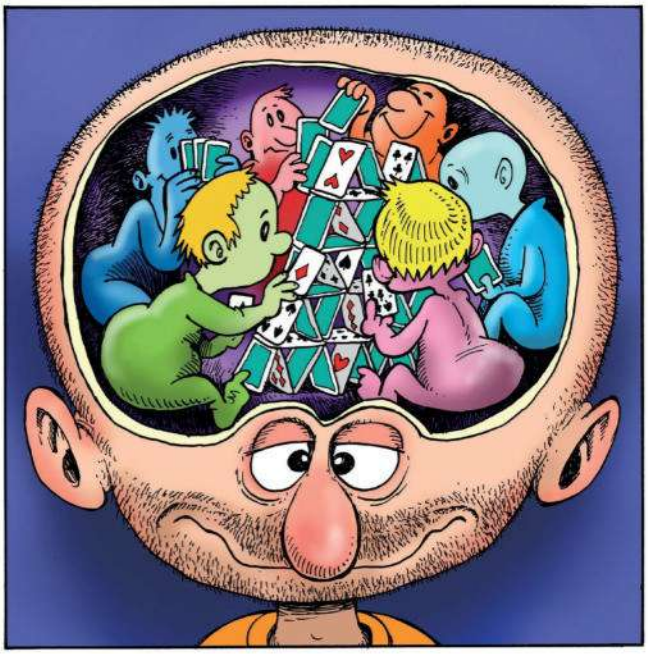
ART FOR ART'S SAKE [FT440:18]

Munich's Pinakothek der Moderne art gallery fired a 51-year-old member of their technical staff after he hung one of his own works in an exhibition "in the hope of achieving his artistic breakthrough". The man, who described himself as a freelance artist, put the 23in by 47in (60 by 120 cm) work up in an empty corridor. It was, however, swiftly spotted and removed, and the maverick artist fired and banned from the gallery. In 2023, Bonn's Bundeskunsthalle was more forgiving when a member of the public added their own work to an exhibition, saying "We think it's funny and we want to get to know the artist. So get in touch! There's no trouble. Word of honour." *BBC News, 10 Apr 2024.*

MYTHCONCEPTIONS

by Mat Coward

284: COR! MEMORIES!



ILLUSTRATIONS BY HUNT EMERSON

The myth

We each have a small, limited number of 'core memories', formed from events in early childhood, which between them determine our personality for the rest of our lives.

The "truth"

This is a recently born belief, which is thought to come from the hit 2015 animated film *Inside Out*. Social media today is awash with people sharing and discussing the core memories which made them who they are. But scientists who study memory suggest the idea is faulty on several grounds. Firstly, there is no reason why important autobiographical memories should be restricted to just five (as in the movie), or any other number; our long-term memory has, as far as anyone knows, infinite storage. Secondly, there is no evidence that fundamental character traits are made or remodelled by recalling childhood events. Besides, memories aren't replayed, like a recording; they are rebuilt each time we access them. As every fortean investigator knows, memories are never 'true'; they may contain truths, but they are not unchanging, objective records of events. So if core memories were the stuff our personalities are made of, then our whole characters could alter every time we remembered a 'core'. It's interesting to note that amnesia doesn't significantly affect personality. Finally, our strongest, most lasting memories aren't usually from early childhood anyway, but from the period between the ages of 10 and 30 known as "the reminiscence bump".

Sources

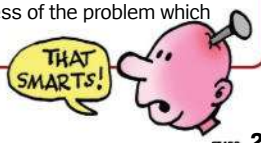
www.uow.edu.au/media/2022/are-core-memories-real-the-science-behind-5-commonmyths.php; www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6289446/; www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/core-memory-what-is-it_l_63754482e4b07a02ca7f1f66

Disclaimer

Although in general animated films are an infallible guide to scientific truths, current understanding says this one got it wrong. But, of course, current understanding changes all the time…

Mythchaser

Pain is a vital messenger, we are taught, alerting us that something is wrong. But, asks a reader, is this true in the case of persistent pain, not directly caused by currently existing damage? And does the severity of a pain necessarily correspond to the seriousness of the problem which triggered it?



What would disclosure look like?

NIGEL WATSON ponders UFO secrets, alien fakes and unlikely encounters with extraterrestrials

OPENING THE DOORS TO AREA 51

For decades ufological disclosure has been imminent, but what exactly do we expect from disclosure? What would opening the doors to Area 51 reveal?

Would there be the nine gleaming flying saucers powered by Moscovium (element 115) as described by Bob Lazar? Would we be introduced to dead or alive Extraterrestrial Biological Entities (EBEs)? Would we get to visit underground alien bases such as the one at Dulce, New Mexico, where it was claimed there was a firefight between the US military and aliens? Would the worldwide network of appropriately named DUMBs (Deep Underground Military Bases) be revealed? Would secret alien/human bases on the Moon and Mars be unveiled? Would the loose federation of different aliens from the Pleiades, Andromeda, Lyra, Procyon, Tau Ceti, Sirius A and Ummo be presented on the world stage? Would we finally learn about the greys and the real nature of alien abductions? Would extraterrestrial anti-gravity and free energy devices be made available to the public? Would we learn that the aliens and their craft are really time travellers, or are coming through portals that interact with our planet? Are they really androids, or perhaps cryptoterrestrials? Will we find out more about the infamous Men In Black and why our governments have worked so hard to keep UFO knowledge secret?

Those are just a splattering of ideas that have been promoted by ufologists and whistleblowers who have testified under oath to the US Congress. Most people would love to discover that flying saucers have been recovered from Roswell and other less famous locations, and that they have been reverse-engineered; or at least that UFOs are some type of exotic craft or phenomenon.

Yet, in the cold light of day we can see that since the 1970s governments throughout the world have released thousands of secret UFO reports and files. Certainly, some cases are hard to explain, but the vast majority of them are explicable as mundane phenomena. The government files contain material not much different from that collected by civilian organisations like NICAP, MUFON and BUFORA. There is no smoking gun evidence of treaties with aliens or of crashed saucers – unless you believe the faked Operation Majestic 12 reports that at one time dominated ufological thinking.

MUMMY DEAREST

You have to admire Mexican journalist Jaime Maussan for continuing to promote his alien

LEFT: Maussan's mummies are just Mexican dolls made of paper, glue and animal bones.

FOTOHOLICA PRESS AGENCY / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

mummies (see **FT437:17, 441:24**), which in the latest analysis he claims contain 30 per cent unknown DNA. Of course, like fragments of alien technology, such evidence is always ambiguous and needs further analysis using more sophisticated techniques and equipment, leaving the door open for wild claims and speculation. At the moment Maussan is negotiating with the authorities in Peru so that the samples can be sent to the US for examination.

One of Maussan's collaborators is Dr Martín Achirica Ramos, who works at an alternative health clinic and has published a book about the mummies – *Expediente abierto: Toda la verdad sobre los cuerpos no humanos de Nazca* (Open File: All the Whole Truth about the Non-Human Bodies of Nazca), Tendencias, 2024. The book notes that after six years of study of these strange biological remains, which were found in the region of Nazca lines in 2017, the evidence indicates they lived here 1,000 years ago and are not part of the human species.

There is considerable scepticism from other experts not under Maussan's spell, who claim Peru has a long history of tomb raiding and turning archæological remains and animal parts into "dolls" to sell to tourists.

The whole saga of the 'discovery' of these mummies is laughable and they are very probably fakes. Those involved in "scientifically" examining the mummies seem to believe they are ancient aliens, but they are suffering from the desire to believe.

If you think about it, how would humanoid aliens with three long fingers survive? They would be incredibly clumsy and it seems doubtful they would be capable of making a cup of tea, let alone operating a flying saucer.

Despite the scepticism, with the support of disclosure proponent Republican Tim Burchett, the mummies are to be examined by the University of Tennessee, which specialises in the forensic examination of human remains. Republican Anna Paulina Luna also wants more Congressional hearings on otherworldly matters before the end of the year. *www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-13193251/Two-new-alien-mummies-Peru-revealed-shipped-DNA-tests.html; www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-13739361/congress-investigates-alien-mummies-peru-independent-analysis-tennessee.html*

STARING AT UAPs

The comments section of a *Daily Mail* online interview with Luis Elizondo, the head of the UAP programme that never existed except in his own mind, is the best bit as it contains some personal testimonies.

Here Kate1111 writes: "I believe him, and I've had my own experiences with orbs throughout my whole life but the ones I've seen are blue. They're part of my earliest memory, which also includes a blue being. I've seen a Reptilian too, when I was six years old. I know it sounds crazy and bizarre, but I speak the truth and I don't care anymore who believes me."

R309 writes: "I am not crazy, drunk, or delusional, I am a retired PhD professor. One day, when I lived in Miami, I walked outside in my backyard and saw a creature about 8-10 feet [2.4-3m] tall, about 3 or 4 feet [90-120cm] off the ground. Apparently, I startled it, because it hissed like a cat and then disappeared in a haze. That same day, I developed hives all over my body that lasted for about a year. This happened about 10 years ago, and it was just this year I felt comfortable telling my wife."

There are numerous accounts of UAP sightings including this report by Brett: "My wife has twice seen UFOs. One time it was daytime and she saw something and she went to get her camera to take a picture and she was flashed with some sort of light and next thing she knows about 4-5 hours have passed and she doesn't know what happened. Another time she was walking on the beach at night (in England) and she saw one of these black triangles. She saw it and ran. She decided not to stay and take a picture this time."

No doubt any photograph would have got lost, did not develop, or just showed an out-of-focus blob. *www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13754869/government-ufo-pentagon-spacecraft-luis-elizondo-imminent-book.html*

Threads from inner space

JENNY RANDLES looks at the relationship between anomalous experience and consciousness

I have long believed that UFOs are more than the sum of their parts and quite probably something more than 'merely' visitors from another planet. Many years ago I began to focus on the experiencer rather than the experiences they report. I started to ask why we literalise what we see, producing results that resemble allegory rather than reality. By this, I mean we tell ourselves a kind of story to frame events that we presume are substantive and in the world outside our heads – when quite possibly the Universe is inside our heads and we each create a kind of personalised hologram of our own reality. This may be shaped by a collective framework defined by science and physical reality, but when we look at things like close encounters we may be dealing with something like an internal monologue that attempts to translate things we can sense, but not actually as yet understand.

Humans have always done this. We see things in the sky, such as stars, but for many years had no real concept of what they are. Were they just out of reach in the sky? Quite possibly, when 'out of reach' was defined as how far you can throw a stone or fire a gun heavenward. But eventualy, we sent instruments into space to study them.

All through this process of discovery, we often get things very wrong. Trial and error is the way our understanding of the Universe unfolds. We need to be wrong in order to finally determine what might be right. That is the nature of science: learning by experience and testing hypotheses until we reach a point where all the clues fall into place and we can arrive at a credible theory we can test against future discoveries. I fear most UFO investigators think they are Galileo, but are actually more like people living thousands of years before he was even born, still identifying stars as candles in the temple of the Gods.

I tend now to go back to basics. The thing we start with is the witness's experience of what they think they see. That is not necessarily the same as what they actually saw. In fact, as every UFO investigator discovers from day one, UFOs almost always are *not* what they seem to be. They may be *unidentified* by the witness at the time, but nearly every case reveals they are usually not *unidentifiable*.

You have to deal with that fact before you can dig deeper and ask if *what we see* is not actually *what we think we see*. Does this result from an interior process not necessarily determined by exterior reality?

The UFO mystery may be the price we pay for the success we have achieved

What we observe is filtered through the human mind and human perception, and there is always a little voice in the background telling us what to assume. We go through a series of escalations until we reach the point where the obvious turns into the mysterious and the urge to explain becomes a need to speculate. This is why so often people see a satellite burning up and report not the train of debris that is actually visible, but an 'alien' craft with windows on the side (in reality, just separate pieces of junk miles up in the sky in a disconnected trail). Our presumption of what we are watching 'joins the dots' and creates a structured craft of extraterrestrial origin out of a debris chain very much of Earthly design.

Such thinking is arguably both the blessing and the curse of humanity. Mystery is the mother and father of imagination – and imagination has made us into the dominant species on Earth; but along the way, it has created more than a few false trails that took us in the wrong direction. The UFO mystery may be the price we pay for the success we have achieved, one of the wrong guesses we make that may one day lead to the single correct one.

This is why I started looking into how UFOs interact with our consciousness. It was why I latched onto the importance of the Oz Factor – a state of mind in which we refocus internally during the perception of strange phenomena. Time and space seem to distort due to this internal focusing as something within tells us to pay attention. It is like a siren in our subconscious alerting us to an event. It does not need to be 'real' in a physical sense if it does the job of nudging you onto the right path.

Once you recognise that things like this happen, it is possible to train yourself to look out for them. They are not always obvious and the subtler ones are the kind I have tried to look for, even if they often appear to be just amusing coincidences. Of course, coincidence is sometimes just that. With a myriad events each day, congruence will often happen by chance. However, I find it worth noting when coincidences happen they can focus your mind in the right direction to unravel something you otherwise might have missed.

Here is an example from 1988 which came to mind after watching the TV drama Nolly, written by Doctor Who guru Russell T Davies. Nolly was about Noelle Gordon, lead actress in the soap opera *Crossroads* that was set in a Birmingham motel. The series was cancelled in 1987, and from that point they screened fewer episodes per week to take the show into the spring of 1988, despite the scripts having been written and filmed and sometimes linked to the dates when they were originally intended to air. By chance, they had decided to write a UFO storyline into the series, where a young woman had a sighting just before a conference on the subject was to be held in the motel. The storyline was recorded in the autumn of 1987, but scheduled to appear around Valentine's Day, airing between 14 and 18 February 1988. However, as the show had been axed and the number of weekly episodes reduced, these ones actually appeared in March, despite the Valentine's Day references.

Remarkably, real UFOs amusingly 'protested' and made spectacular appearances over the area where *Crossroads* was set at the very time the storyline was originally meant to be shown, with police seeing a glowing object pass over them and an RAF base picking up a radar target for a few seconds before it suddenly disappeared.

When these things occurred it made me smile; I had written a piece for the national press on UFO sightings, as I had a new book coming out that month, and the piece actually appeared the morning after the police sightings occurred. Moreover I had been consulting with Central TV about a debate show on UFOs which aired live on 18 February, just 36 hours after the local wave occurred.

Of course, it could all have been just a series of coincidences. But I am not as sure now as I was back then that coincidence does not at times morph into synchronicity – a beacon in your consciousness urging you to seek a deeper meaning in events.

Next issue, I will try to explain more about why I think UFOs may be, in a sense, a surface manifestation of a much more deeply rooted and potentially valuable human experience.

Women in White

THE MYSTERY OF PHANTOM LADIES

In updating Andrew Green's classic 1977 book, **ALAN MURDIE** found that female spectres are as widespread, and difficult to identify, as ever – but what might they actually be?

"It has always interested me that the majority of ghosts reported in Britain consist of phantom ladies."

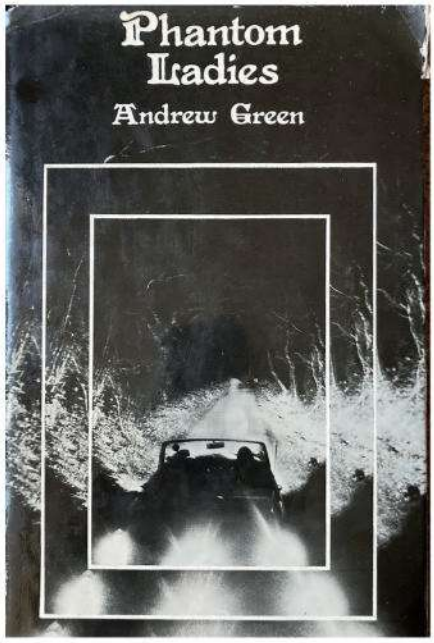
So began veteran ghost hunter Andrew Green (1927-2004) in *Phantom Ladies*, his 1977 gazetteer of places around the UK where the ghost was believed to be female. In it he listed places associated with an account of a ghostly lady, together with directions of how to reach the site.

Green believed that ghosts were a real phenomenon, and his book was aimed at scientific ghost hunters. A great advocate for modernising the subject, he wanted to strip away colourful folklore and what he saw as outmoded and superstitious notions about spirits and to establish ghost hunting as a branch of parapsychology.

Both *Phantom Ladies* and his previous nationwide gazetteer *Our Haunted Kingdom* (1973) concentrated on contemporary sightings from all counties of Great Britain, listing places where ghosts had been experienced in the previous 25 years and might be recordable using photography and scientific instrumentation.

I shall always remain glad that his books were among the first that I read on the subject. Reading them at the time, it was this scientific, even rather materialist outlook which originally appealed to me. Green sometimes called himself "a ghost hunter who doesn't believe in ghosts". His explanation for them was that they arose from a form of persistent mental energy, perhaps electromagnetic in nature, generated by living human minds, which was capable of being fixed at physical locations. After the death of the originator this energy remained and could be perceived – by being seen, heard or even smelt by sensitive people – and interpreted as a ghost. Such residues possessed no consciousness, effectively being mental traces of their creators which eventually faded away. At the sites listed in *Phantom Ladies* the originators of this haunting energy were all believed to have been once-living women. Certain other ghostly phenomena might be accounted for by the still controversial abilities of telepathy and psychokinesis, with poltergeist activity representing energy released by still living minds.

For many years Green's ideas seemed to me to be among the most plausible explanations for ghosts (early impressions often count). From 1996 I came to know Andrew personally and went on to enjoy an extensive correspondence and many discussions with him on visits to his home at Mountfield in Sussex, up until his death in May 2004. Later I became his literary executor and over the last decade I have endeavoured to keep knowledge of his work and research alive. Thus, it was inevitable that his ideas would continue to influence me.



No relationship with once-living women could be established

Nonetheless, as the years have rolled by, I have come to recognise limitations in his explanatory theories regarding the causes of haunting phenomena, and the fact that they do not encompass many aspects of ghost experiences. This impression has crystallised after editing a new edition of *Phantom Ladies*. Reviewing the entries he compiled in the hope of inspiring ghost hunters into research efforts, I came to realise he had missed a wider pattern in the data as a whole: the repeated manifestation at diverse locations of a single phantom lady dressed in white.

WHO'S THAT GIRL?

Principally, *Phantom Ladies* is a UK-wide collection of haunted places, each with a specific ghostly female, with names and identities being proposed for many based on a particular woman known or believed to have been related to the site in the past. In checking and updating entries it became clear that a number of places were still considered actively haunted (e.g. Chicksands Priory in Bedfordshire; see **FT430:18-21**). But when it came to asking the question, 'Who was she?' problems swiftly arose, as no clear relationship with any once-living woman could be established beyond mere guesswork, rumour or hearsay.

Great care must be taken with eyewitness testimony when it comes to establishing identity, as psychology and the law have long-recognised.

Repeatedly, even in cases where the ghost was well witnessed, standards of identification fall short of what constitutes proof.

In English criminal cases the direction for assessing eyewitness accounts is set out in the case of *R v Turnbull* [1977] (Court of Appeal).[1] Before eyewitness evidence of identity is considered acceptable, a jury must be directed to take care, with the judge explaining how a witness or even several witnesses can all be mistaken.

Relevant factors include the length of observation, distance, illumination and whether there was a reason why a witness could make such an identification. Juries are reminded that sometimes even when recognising close friends and relatives, mistakes can be made. Any material discrepancies between the witness's description and the presumed or actual appearance of someone accused must be weighed up accordingly.

Applying this approach to many sightings of phantom ladies, it became apparent that the evidence for a firm identification was wholly lacking at many sites.

With ghosts dating from beyond living memory – quite apart from the risk of misperceiving mist, a cloud of steam or a dress hanging on a washing line as a human figure – there is simply no one left alive who would

ANDY KAY / ETIENNE GILFILLAN

ABOVE: Blithfield Hall in Staffordshire, the site of an auditory haunting – so how do we establish the sex of the ghosts? **BELOW:** A typically romantic image of a French *Dame Blanche* in a 19th century engraving

be able to make a reliable identification to the standard required in a *Turnbull* direction.

Unless the figure is of someone personally known to the observer, as in the case of someone who has recently died (though carrying the corresponding risk a sighting might be dismissed as a post-bereavement hallucination), we are on shaky ground. The most a witness might be able to testify is that the ghost looked like someone in an antique painting or old photograph (itself leading to the possibility of suggestion and a hallucination if such an image had been seen before).

In fact, many places seem to have fallen victim to a form of 'deceased celebrity culture', a process whereby in order to account for ghost manifestations the name of a famous or notorious previous resident or visitor (preferably a Queen or aristocrat) is casually or recklessly attached to them for want of any other plausible explanation. Moreover, especially with stately homes, it is apparent that in many cases Phantom Ladies are only being 'identified' by nicknames, frequently derived from the alleged colour of their clothes or costumes. Green's *Phantom Ladies* includes Blue Ladies, Green Ladies, Red Ladies, Pink Ladies and Ladies in Yellow. Some sites possess impressive portraits, which may have encouraged the idea. But disappointingly few of these colourfully-attired spectres are ever spotted in their full glory.

As an aside, I wonder whether notions of colourfully dressed ladies reflects the impact once made upon a less visually sophisticated audience, when the rich hues in the portraiture of the 18th century brought vivid, bright colours into popular consciousness for the first time. ("Every good ghost story of the late 18th century featured sinister paintings," comments one art historian.) [2]

Proving even more difficult in terms of establishing personal identity are purely auditory hauntings. Unless a voice is heard, the phenomenon may be "merely a noise of unknown gender" as reported at Blithfield Hall near Rugeley, Staffordshire. The Hall is reputedly haunted by two male and two female ghosts, with reports of sounds of rustling skirts; but as Andrew Green acknowledged, these "could be either that of a woman's gown or a priest's robes."

The question remains whether the apparition or the voice is identical with the dead lady or is a psychic projection, and whether manifestations come from the deceased personality or from knowledge in the unconscious mind of the witness (perhaps obtained paranormally).

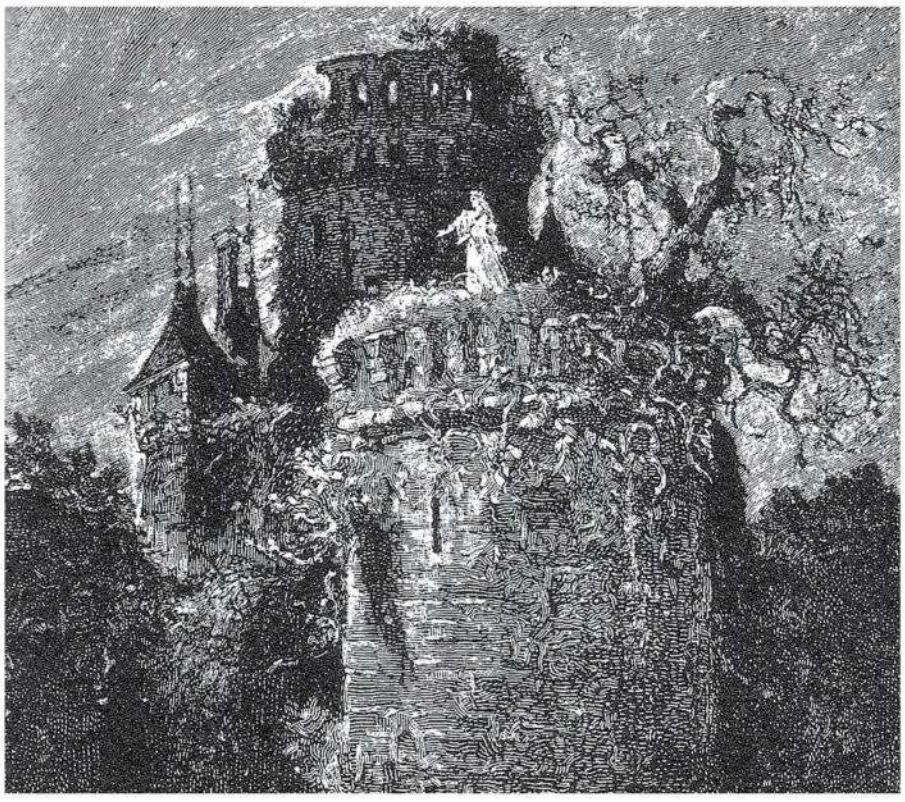
A PALER SHADE OF WHITE

Whatever the situation, in sifting through accounts in visual cases we find that the fashion is for the palest shades of clothing. Admittedly, many sightings occur in conditions of low illumination, but often there is an absence of any mention of bright colours: typical is a "white form" seen at a factory in Luton, while another from Sussex merely reports "a vague shape like a white dress" flitting past a hall window.

Indeed, this marked tendency towards monochromatic female ghosts helps explain the preponderance of 'Grey Ladies' and 'White Ladies' who populate the country (to the human eye, white is technically an achromatic combination of all the colours on the spectrum).

And there is one additional characteristic or hallmark that repeatedly appears and effectively scuppers any chance of a positive identification. Time and again, the face of the Phantom Lady is not visible. Repeatedly

Admittedly, many sightings occur in conditions of low illumination



ABOVE: Whitley Abbey School in Coventry, built on the former site of a grand house, was the location for White Lady scares through the 1980s and 1990s.

witnesses aver her back is turned, she looks away or is veiled or – more frighteningly if seen full-on – her facial features are distorted or absent altogether (for more on faceless phantoms, see **FT385:18-20**).

I realised a prime example was contained in the first ever *Ghostwatch* column I contributed to *Fortean Times* back in July 2006 (**FT212:19**). The previous month, Mr Roger Froggatt, landlord at the Low Valley Arms, at Wombwell near Barnsley, South Yorkshire, suffered a severe shock from seeing such a figure. He went downstairs after suspecting a burglar was present at about 1.30am on a Tuesday morning after three large television screens in the pub were inexplicably switched on and an alarm activated. Searching his pub, he entered the ladies' toilets and was appalled to see "a woman with no face and silvery grey hair, dressed in a white gown". He said afterwards: "I stood there for about four or five seconds before I fled in terror."

Just outside was his wife Mrs Kathryn Froggatt, 49, who witnessed his severe shock. She stated: "He was shaking, he was white, and he wouldn't move. He just kept saying 'face, face… it's horrible, it's horrible'." Seeing her husband's condition, she called 999 and the police arrived to find toilets flushing by themselves. They summoned an ambulance for Mr Frogatt. Recalling his experience sometime later, Mr Froggatt stated: "It was the ugliest thing I have ever seen… I know what I saw, and I know there is something here."

Pubs such as the Low Valley Arms (later renamed the Wat Tyler Inn, now closed and demolished) are among a wide range of places, including highways, known for such encounters.

PHANTOMS OR FOLKLORE?

Now at this point, sceptical folklorists may assert 'Woman in White' stories are a tale type and not to be treated as indicative of some genuine phenomenon. Addressing accounts gathered by paranormal investigators, Jacqueline Simpson and Jennifer Westwood in their compendium *The Lore of the Land* (2008) express the view that "to the folklorist's eye they are recognisable legends in their material though deprived of specific details."

Folklorists may cite ideas of migratory legends and point to how briefly excitement can buzz like a burning beehive at random locations whenever a White Lady sighting is claimed before it fades away entirely (e.g. at Whitley in Coventry in the early 1980s and Coalisland, Northern Ireland, in January 2009). [3]

Personally, I do not feel this provides grounds for dismissing contemporary witness testimony or disbelieving first-hand accounts. The fact we tell stories about Robin Hood and Dick Turpin does not mean we disbelieve the crime victim of today, the man, woman or child who was assaulted or robbed in the street last night. True, you must check and test witness accounts so far as possible. And yes, the stories may sound like a legend or a tradition – until a phantom steps out and you encounter her.

Others may draw comparisons with Phantom Hitchhiker lore, but, in contrast, actual witnesses to this elusive figure are exceedingly rare – a tiny fraction compared with those reporting a woman in white or grey. [4] Indeed, as one of the fathers of urban legend research, Jan Brunvand, in his book *The Vanishing Hitchhiker* (1983), suggests that the type seems parasitic to existing phantom lady traditions. The folklorist Philip Brandt George proposes that in some places in the USA it has been built upon the existing legend of La Llorona, the ghostly crying woman in white, a widespread tradition in Latin American ghostlore (see **FT351:28-29, 373:49**). [5]

It proves easy to accumulate instances, often only locally known.

In 1965 a White Lady was seen at an antique house in Gravel Lane, Chigwell, by Colonel Arthur Noble and his wife, who had moved in 15 years earlier. Col Noble said it walked right past him and he sensed it was friendly, but the idea of calling in a medium was rejected. [6]

Between 1967 and 1969 a menacing phantom White Lady and poltergeist manifestations drove the McGhee family from a house in Spenser Grove, Stoke Newington, in London. Collectively witnessed, it was seen to emerge from a wardrobe and was described as a woman in white with a distorted face with large dark holes or craters where the eyes ought to have been. The haunting built up, culminating in unexplained fires, strange noises and poltergeist phenomena (witnessed by Tom Perrott, Peter Underwood and others), afflicting the property for several nightmarish weeks before the family fled. Hackney Council refused to help the McGhees and accused them of negligence for fleeing the property in the middle of the night. The argu-

LEFT: Some have suggested links between the White Lady and the Latin American La Llorona, a ghostly crying woman in white seen here in a 2019 film *The Curse of La Llorona*.

ments reached the High Court, which ruled that the Council, even if sceptical, ought to have given more regard to their testimony. The authority's reasoning was flawed and their decision quashed. A rent tribunal later found for the McGhees, reducing their rent to 25p per week. Eventually, the house was demolished. [7]

In 1975 a sighting of a 'Grey Lady' with a blank oval instead of a face was recorded from witnesses at a private home by Brian Nisbet for the Society for Psychical Research (published in 1982).

From March 1977 a White Lady manifested over eight months in a house in Hart Dyke Road, Swanley, Kent, terrifying Mrs Joan Jones, 50, and her children. It appeared after her youngest daughter Elaine, 15, found a Victorian ring in the garden. Mrs Jones, Elaine, her elder sister Linda, 23, and her brother, aged 15, all saw the woman in white standing in the house. Linda saw the White Lady close up, noting the face appeared twisted and that the figure displayed a ring which resembled the one Elaine had unearthed. A previous occupier linked the White Lady with a woman who died in childbirth in the house.

In spring 1985 Mrs Joan Morris saw a woman in a white and grey dress and mob cap "with no face distinguishable" at her home in Wye, near Ashford, in Kent. This same figure had previously appeared in 1948, being sketched by a Miss Cox and reproduced in Ian Wilson's *In Search of Ghosts* (1995). However, it is unclear whether the crude face depicted reflected the actual appearance or the artistic limitations of Miss Cox. [8]

Between 1999 and 2010 an old woman in light clothing haunted the now closed Rainbow Café on King's Parade in Cambridge. It was presumed to be Mrs Sadie Barnett, a renowned Cambridge landlady who died in 1991, but there is no absolute certainty as to the identification.

And, of course, numerous researchers have recorded examples of spectral pedestrians and jaywalkers who are often described manifesting in white or pale apparel; the A75/B721 road in southern Scotland is prone to encounters, with examples between 2010 and 2012 recorded by Dr Peter McCue.

An old woman haunted the now closed Rainbow Café in Cambridge

Such accounts turn out to have parallels and analogous sightings beyond the UK.

In Colombia in spring 2009 a 27-year-old woman, Carolina M, was travelling in a car with her family after dark on a country road near Cali, in the southwest of the country, early one evening. Being closer to the equator, it gets darker here earlier than in higher latitudes and the family were hastening home after a social outing. The young woman noticed the figure of a woman in white standing on the verge who crossed the road in front of them and vanished. Later, in the family home in Cali, she twice saw the figure of what she took to be the same woman walking up the staircase; her younger sister also saw the figure at the same spot. The facial features were never visible.

On the other side of the world, in autumn 2020, eerie phenomena, with parallels to the Spenser Grove case mentioned above, were reported at a rented bungalow at Pukekhoe near Auckland, New Zealand. The occupiers, five Filipino workers, heard piteous weeping and saw a menacing old woman with dark spots or holes where her eyes should have been; she might have had a sister, if not a twin, at Spenser Grove. Scaffolder Darwin Rivera described being scared by the woman with long dark hair and an angry expression standing outside the French doors leading from his room. On one occasion she was reportedly seen by a remote observer engaged in a video call with one of the men.

Journalists contacted the previous owners of the bungalow, who confirmed being disturbed by an other-worldly presence some 24 years earlier, but that nothing had troubled them for two decades before selling up in February 2020. Former owner Mr Kim Tiltyard said that despite having the house blessed, disturbances continued. His wife Christine stated that they eventually coped by adopting safeguards and precautions, recalling, "We just kept the wardrobe door closed. There's a wardrobe in there that we just never opened. So, I'd say they've opened the wardrobe door – and whatever is in there has come out." Mrs Tilyard wondered if it was connected with her own mother, but she had only died in 2020.

With this class of sightings, the electromagnetic residues and 'recording type' hypothesis favoured by Green and other researchers for apparitions abruptly crumble.

ABOVE: This bungalow in Pukekhoe, New Zealand, was the unlikely site for a White Lady haunting in 2020.

A *prima facie* conclusion is that we are presented with a potentially global phenomenon, and one which is ongoing. Stories of such apparitions are found in Europe, North America, Australasia and the Far East.

As Hammerson Peters, in Canada, notes: "All over the world, there are certain special spots which local tradition contends are haunted by solitary ghostly women clad in monochromatic garments." [9]

"It is the extraordinary uniformity in the reports, from every age, country, and class of society, the uniformity in hallucination, that makes the mystery," wrote the distinguished scholar Andrew Lang in 1903 of the ubiquitous poltergeist. [10] The same may be said of the Phantom White Lady.

WHAT IS SHE?

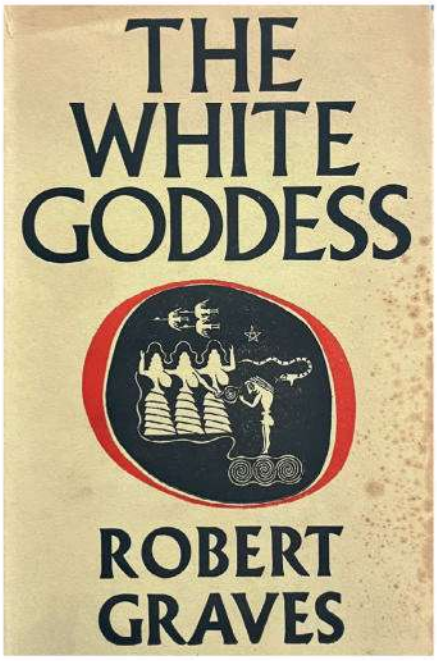
Since the foundation of psychical research, investigators have endeavoured to find patterns within data, the elusive 'signal in the noise' that might make sense of such phenomena. We have the signal – but because of their sporadic nature these apparitions pose major problems, both theoretical and practical, for any investigator seeking to study them; especially as the ubiquitous White Lady seems to fall outside favoured explanatory models and paradigms proposed in psychical research,

Delving back beyond living memory, to the 1880s and the most enthusiastic period for the collection of apparition reports by the Society for Psychical Research, one finds an account of a classic White Lady Phantom in volume II of *Phantasms of the Living* (1886), a monumental study of crisis apparitions (i.e. one-off sightings of the form of a person who was dying or undergoing some trauma at the time, typically seen by friends or relatives). Psychical researchers Edmund Gurney, Frederic Myers and Frank Podmore advanced a 'telepathic hallucination' hypothesis to account for these, whereby the dying person projected an image of themselves to distant witnesses.

However, one sighting which confounded this model came from officers who had seen the apparition of a woman in white passing the upper windows of the officer's mess at Aldershot Barracks at Christmas 1875 (see **FT218:55, 297:16-17, 430:19**).

Captain Cecil Norton, of the 5th Lancers, saw a young woman "in what appeared a soiled or somewhat worn bridal dress, walk or glide slowly past the window from east to west… No person could have actually been in the position where she appeared as the window was 30 feet [9m] above the ground."

Gurney and Myers succeeded in tracing a number of officers present who also recalled seeing this eldritch lady passing by the window (I suspect the sighting may have been the origin of 'Spring-heeled Jack' stories later circulating at Aldershot barracks). There were hints the woman resembled a figure in a photograph some officers may have seen beforehand. Further corroborating statements were obtained in 1897 implying it



was possibly linked with the death on 3 January 1876 of an army veterinary surgeon who had been present; but there was no way of establishing this or any way to fit it into the 'telepathic hallucination' hypothesis.

The question is, if the White Lady is not a spirit, a lingering personal mental trace or a 'telepathic hallucination', what might she represent?

The possibility should be considered that in some, perhaps a majority of, cases we are not dealing with phantoms that relate to any individual and once-living woman, but a symbolic form or exotic imitation of a female, one displaying superhuman characteristics, operating independently of the normal constraints of time and space.

Various speculative ideas can be canvassed. One is an archetypal hallucination arising from the collective unconscious proposed by Carl Jung. Such experiences were explored by Jungian analyst Anita Jaffre in her 1963 book *Apparitions*, in which she noted the ubiquity of phantom females, their numinous character, the inherent symbolism of white attire (depending on the cultural context, white may symbolise purity and innocence, or be emblematic of death, the divine or the afterlife), the characteristic of facelessness and a function as warnings. She interpreted them as channelling deeper levels of the psyche not limited by space-time. Jung himself wrote: "It not infrequently happens that the archetype appears in the form of a spirit in dreams or fantasy products, or even comports itself like a ghost." [11]

Alternatively, do these apparitions fit the classical notion of 'daimons' or non-human presences akin to nymphs and semi-divine figures advanced by Patrick Harpur in his 1995 book *Daimonic Reality*? Harpur devotes the chapter entitled 'Ladies' to historic, cross-cultural and folkloric parallels, postulating that the 'WeiBe Frau' in Germany and the 'Dame Blanche' in France are autonomous entities or personifications existing in an alternative reality or dimension, partly within our imaginations and partly external to our brains, and capable of achieving a degree of objective reality on occasion. Examples might include banshees, angels and goddesses.

LEFT: Could the White Lady be the manifestation of a pre-Christian goddess figure as in Robert Graves's controversial book?

Heading further into the speculative fringes is the much-contested 'White Goddess' hypothesis promoted by poet Robert Graves (1895-1985). Graves conceived of a White Goddess worshipped in different guises as a female deity or presence in classical antiquity and the origin of poetic inspiration. Just how serious Graves was is hotly debated, but the idea of a manifesting 'goddess' figure has been influential in neo-paganism. [12]

Further, or alternatively, could the White Lady as an expression of some cosmic or female principle within nature itself, manifesting in such a form, perhaps be generated by certain landscapes and environments?

Whatever the case, we should not limit our thinking on the possibilities.

NOTES

1 1977. 1 QB 224

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10 Andrew Lang, "The Poltergeist Historically Considered", *Proceedings* of the Society for Psychical Research, Vol 17, 1903, p. 323.

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12 Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft*, OUP, 1999.

***Phantom Ladies: The New Edition* (2024) by Andrew Green and Alan Murdie is published by Arima Publishing, £11.96.**

ALAN MURDIE is a lawyer and writer with a longstanding interest in fortean phenomena. He has investigated hauntings both in Britain and abroad. A former president of the Ghost Club, he compiles FT's Ghostwatch column.

Legends of the Grey Lady

REBECCA BATLEY explores a long-lived and enduringly popular branch of British ghostlore that has given rise to many a myth – and on one occasion even caused a riot.

Today, ghosts are the stuff of mass entertainment, with YouTube channels, documentaries and guidebooks all dedicated to ghost hunting, and new ghost stories continue to appear regularly, often documented by Alan Murdie in his regular 'Ghostwatch' column. But no ghost is more enduringly popular, or more frequently sighted, than the Grey Lady. She is for many the quintessential ghost, and a 'Grey Lady' character appears in films such as *Ghostbusters*, *The Good Witch* and the *Harry Potter* series. This modern fascination with Grey Lady ghosts was in part born from the migration of people into Britain's cities during the 18th and 19th centuries, a process that created ready breeding grounds for rumour and, in some cases, even hysteria, as new street light technology created menacing shadows and mysterious shapes in the smog (see **FT297:32-37**). Grey Lady spectres soon appeared in numerous magazines, books and penny dreadfuls in tales intended to fascinate and terrify.

SYBIL'S SPECTRE

The origins of the Grey Lady legend, though, are much older. One of her most famous manifestations, which had been reported for centuries before the Victorian craze for ghost stories, can be found at Hampton Court. Cardinal Wolsey's mighty palace is said to be haunted by numerous spectres (see **FT326:16-18**), but none older than the Grey Lady, who was first reported as far back as the early 1700s. She is said to be the ghost of Sybil Penn, a Tudor courtier who faithfully attended on four monarchs. Penn was of a good Buckinghamshire family and served Henry VIII, becoming wet nurse to the infant Edward VI after the death of the child's mother, Jane Seymour. Edward granted her a manor at Beamond and a rectory at Little Missenden, but we know that she did not retire to the country and instead spent her life at court. The court accounts tell us that after Edward's death she served at the court of Mary I and later at that of her sister Elizabeth I. She nursed Elizabeth through smallpox in 1562, when the young queen came close to death. Elizabeth survived, but Sybil contracted the disease herself and died on 6 November that year. Sybil was buried in the chancel of Hampton Church and

Cardinal Wolsey's palace is said to be haunted by numerous spectres

ABOVE: Postcards showing Hampton Court's famous 'Grey Lady' were once very popular. **BELOW:** Effigy of Sybil Penn, St Mary's Hampton. **FACING PAGE:** "Tomb of Sybil Penn, Nurse to King Edward VI" by Daniel Lyson (1762–1834).

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PEN here is broughte to dorne The place of longe abode
Whose vertu guided hathe her shippe, and sequyer rode
A myrror of her tyme, for vertues of the myndle
A warrone suche as in her dayes the like was herd no tyme
No Plant of servile stocke, but Hampden by discene
Unto whose race 300 yeres, hathe frendly fortune lente
To Courte she called was, to Foster up a Kinge
Whose helping hand long lyvinge Sures, so speede and did bring
Twoo Quenes that Scepter bare, glove credyte to his Dame
Full manye yeres in Courte she dwelt without disgrace or blame
No honour ne worldly wealthe, on earthe she did regarde
Before eche joye yea and her life, her princes health prefarde
Was such as did through heavenly help, her princes thanke deserve
Woolde God the ground were grafte, with trees of suche deserte
That idell braines of fruitefull plances, might find suche cause rowme
As I have plyed my Pen, to praise this Pen withe all
Who lyeth entombed in this Grave, untill she Trompe her call
This resting place beholde, no subiece place to hate
To whiche perforce ye lokers on, your plesinge bodyes shall

HOLLY HAMPSHIRE

a fine effigy, complete with an epitaph, was erected. The words of the epitaph read: "Two queens that sceptre bear, gave credit to this dame… Before each joy, yea and her life, her prince's health preserved."

She did not rest in peace, however, but was said to have been seen walking in the church. Then in 1829 a violent storm damaged the building, disturbing Sybil's monument and scattering her remains. Almost immediately, the sounds of a lady spinning were reported from nearby Hampton Court Palace, close to the rooms Sybil had occupied (they still exist today and are currently offices). A hidden chamber was discovered behind one of the walls and was found to contain a spinning wheel, and by 1880 literally hundreds of sightings of Sybil's ghost had been reported. Her figure – thin, grey and gaunt – is said always to walk steadily, turning the air freezing cold when she approaches. It is even claimed that she has been caught on camera, most recently in 2015 when a visiting child captured what some believe to be the ghost of Sybil in a photograph.

GREY LADIES GALORE

This was not the first time that a Grey Lady was claimed to be caught on camera. In 2014, Gordon Watson, a photographer in Northern Ireland, was processing his photos of the famous Dark Hedges – an avenue of beech trees in Stranocum, County Antrim – when he found that there was a ghostly Grey Lady in the centre of one of his images. It was later confirmed that the image had not been doctored or enhanced in any way, leading many to claim the photo as proof of the existence of Grey Lady ghosts. The ghostly woman the image supposedly depicts is something of a mystery. She has reportedly been seen many times throughout the years, gliding along the Dark Hedges, only to disappear at the last tree. The

The sounds of a lady spinning were reported from Hampton Court

beeches were planted as a landscape feature attached to Gracehill House, built in 1775. Some believe that the Grey Lady is the ghost of a maid who disappeared in mysterious circumstances, others that she is a wandering spirit from an ancient graveyard said to have previously existed on the site. On one Hallowe'en night in the 1800s she was said to have been joined by others who had been buried alongside her; the memory of this incident was reputedly enough to make the locals avoid the area for years.

Another Grey Lady, one of the most famous, has been seen at Rufford Old Hall in Lancashire, a mediæval manor house built in 1420 and home to the Hesketh family. This Grey Lady has been glimpsed many times over the centuries and is usually spotted by the main entrance or on the drive that winds its way to the front door. She is said to be the ghost of a woman called Elizabeth Hesketh whose husband was away fighting when she fell dangerously ill. Elizabeth was determined not to die until her husband came home, so that she could say a proper goodbye to him; but he never returned from the battlefield and she died of a broken heart. It is said that her ghost still waits for him to return. Elizabeth's Grey Lady ghost (along with that of a man in Elizabethan dress and the spectre of Queen Elizabeth I) has helped to make Rufford Hall one of the most popular sites in the country for ghost hunters; *Most Haunted* psychic Derek Acorah visited and claimed that he had seen her.

One thing that the Grey Ladies have in common is that they are rarely passive: one even incited a riot. In 1861, a Suffolk woman named Margaretta Greene published a short book, *The Secret Disclosed*, in which she claimed to have uncovered the truth regarding one of the most infamous Grey Ladies of all – Maude Carew, said to haunt the eerie ruins of Bury St Edmunds Abbey. In Greene's wholly invented story she claimed that Maude had fallen in love with a monk named Roger Drury who was accused of sorcery by Henry VI's uncle, Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester. Maude and Henry's queen, Margaret of Anjou, plotted to poison Humphrey, which they did; but Maude died of the poison as well. Greene claimed that Maude's ghost would appear on the night of her death, 24 February, and in 1862 a great number of townspeople gathered to witness her appearance: a riot ensued when

GORDON WATSON

TOP: This photo taken by 12-year-old Holly Hampshire was said to show Hampton Court's Grey Lady. **ABOVE:** The puzzling image captured by Gordon Watson in County Antrim's famous Dark Hedges.

MICHAEL-D-BECKWITH / UNSPLASH

ABOVE: Rufford Old Hall, Lancashire, a 15th century manor house where a Grey Lady has been reported; *Most Haunted*'s Derek Acorah claimed that he had seen her. **BELOW:** Lady Jane Grey, whose bedroom at Chambercombe Manor is said to be haunted by a Grey Lady ghost. **BOTTOM:** Janet Douglas, Lady Glamis.

Maude did not appear and Margaretta's brother barely escaped with his life. Later, Margaretta admitted that she had made up the story, but that did nothing to quell local fascination with Maude. [1]

Another well documented sighting of a Grey Lady, which has garnered much press attention, comes from Chambercombe Manor in Devon. The 11th century manor was held by the Champernon family until the 15th century, when Henry Grey, the first Duke of Suffolk, was granted the property. He was the father of Lady Jane Grey, the infamous "Nine days' Queen", and the house passed to the Crown upon her execution. In 1738 a sealed room was discovered, traditionally believed to be Lady Jane's bedroom, supposedly containing the skeleton of a woman. She was said to have been a visiting relative who was injured in a shipwreck and died in the room, which was then sealed for fear that it would bring bad fortune to anyone entering it. Images claiming to be of her ghost abound and Chambercombe Manor has become a pilgrimage site for many ghost hunters, as well as inevitably featuring on the *Most Haunted* television programme.

Sightings of Grey Ladies have been reported from all over the British Isles. Glamis Castle in Scotland boasts one of the most infamous examples; said to be the ghost of Janet Douglas, Lady Glamis, she haunts the family chapel and the clock tower, where her ghostly form has been seen by many people, including Queen Elizabeth, wife of George VI. Lady Glamis was a controversial figure who, in 1528 was accused of poisoning her husband, John Lyon. She

was found not guilty and married the man she loved, Archibald Campbell. They lived peacefully together for the next decade, but Janet had been born into the powerful Douglas family and her brother, Archibald Douglas, the sixth Earl of Angus, was King James V of Scotland's stepfather, having married his mother Margaret Tudor. James despised his stepfather, who had held him practically as a captive, and after escaping his custody was determined to take his revenge. Archibald himself fled, but Janet remained in Scotland and in 1537 was accused of planning to poison the king and of maintaining communication with her brothers. She was sent to Edinburgh Castle where she was tortured along with her husband and servants. Evidence extracted under this torture, though certainly false, was enough to convict her and she was burnt at the stake in July. Unsurprisingly, it is said that her ghost remains furious at this injustice and still haunts the corridors of the home where she was most happy.

CARRY ON NURSE

Ancient buildings and stately homes are not the only places where Grey Ladies have been seen: many sightings of recent years have come from the remains of Cambridge Military Hospital in Aldershot, which opened in 1879 primarily to treat wounded soldiers and treated thousands of men over the next 120 years. Today, the grand building has acquired listed status and had been converted for residential purposes, but it has often been explored by ghost hunters attracted by the numerous reports of the Grey Lady supposedly haunting the build-

ANDY KAY

ABOVE: A staircase in the former Cambridge Military Hospital in Aldershot, where a Grey Lady in the form of a nurse was once said to haunt the wards.

ing. She is said to walk the corridors of what were once wards 10 and 14, with the scent of lavender heralding her appearance. According to local tradition, she was a dedicated member of Queen Alexandra's Royal Nursing Corps until one day she made a fateful error and accidentally gave an overdose to one of her patients, a young man who had come back from the Western Front in WWI. She watched him die and, overcome by guilt, she threw herself out of one of the top floor windows onto the concrete below. It is said that she appears when her help is needed to guide a soul into the next world, her appearance therefore acting as a harbinger of death.

Those who have reported seeing her describe a "ghostly apparition" which quickly moves on by; just before she appears, the corridor becomes freezing cold. A particularly memorable encounter was recalled by a one-time patient in 1986, who informed one of the nurses that at about 2am he had seen "a woman in uniform standing by a bed three down from me on my side of the ward and I genuinely thought she was the duty officer doing her rounds, but was a bit confused by her uniform, which looked a bit dated as the skirt was very long and [the blouse] had a stiff starched collar… and a cape which was grey, not red." He could not see her face, but the next day the patient three beds down was dead. [2]

Numerous similar instances have been recorded over the years; one patient who saw her was puzzled that her dress seemed to cut off at mid-calf length until a nurse told him that the floors had originally been 12 to 18 inches lower, which would explain why he had not seen her feet. [3]

It is impossible today to determine whether or not these events really occurred, as records from the WWI period are fragmentary, but the relatively recent date and the frequency of Grey Lady sightings at Cambridge Military hospital have prompted many experts to try to explain the phenomenon.

One theory is that initial reports of a Grey Lady were perhaps simply the hallucinations of wounded, traumatised young men coming home after experiencing the horrors of the trenches. Hallucinations or similar psychiatric symptoms in such men are well documented; for example, the research of Stefanie Linden et al into the neurological manifestations of trauma in WWI soldiers shows that in a sample of 100 soldiers, 45 were diagnosed with a "psychopathic constitution" and 46 with "hysteria", which covered symptoms such as gait or speech disorders, trembling, shaking or paralysis, sensory loss and dissociative motor and psychiatric symptoms including visual disturbances. [4] This has led many people to argue that the Grey Lady sightings should therefore be discounted as psychiatric manifestations rather than paranormal phenomena. Most of those claiming sightings, however, remained convinced that they had seen a ghost, whoever she might be.

Whatever the truth behind the many legends and manifestations of the Grey Lady, there are numerous annual sightings of her from all over the UK and beyond. The advent of modern photography and developments in psychiatry have led many to seek either physical evidence of the Grey Lady's existence or a medical explanation for why people see her. Neither attempt has been entirely successful, so ghost hunters will doubtless continue their search for her, helping to sustain the many legends that show no sign of abating.

NOTES

1 Historian and occasional FT contributor Dr Francis Young republished the now extremely rare book in 2019. www.suffolknews.co.uk/bury-st-edmunds/news/bury-ghost-story-legendary-tale-back-in-print-9081628/.

2 "Aldershot's 'haunted' military hospital: Who is the Grey Lady?" www.forcesnews.com/news/aldershots-haunted-military-hospital-who-grey-lady.

3 This is reminiscent of Harry Martindale's famous sighting of a troop of ghostly Roman soldiers passing through the cellars of the Treasurer's House in York; they were cut off at the knees at the level of the flagstones; see **FT364:18-20, 365:16-18**.

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FortеanTimes

PRESENTS

POLTERGEIST!

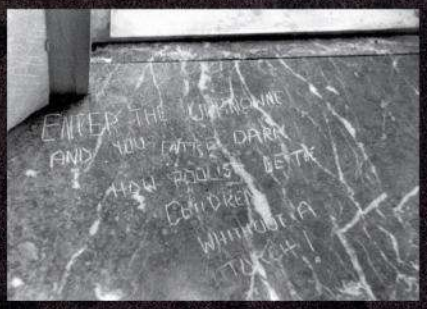
THE WORLD'S MOST TERRIFYING HAUNTINGS

From the archives of FORTEAN TIMES, the world's foremost journal of strange phenomena, comes a new collection exploring the terrifying world of poltergeists.

Providing perfect reading for Hallowe'en, this new special edition from Fortean Times brings together poltergeist cases past and present, focusing on the most terrifying, destructive and sometimes violent hauntings on record.

Join us for a detailed look at cases old and new, from the Enfield haunting - Britain's most famous poltergeist case - and the Black Monk of Pontefract - inspiration for Colin Wilson's study of the phenomenon - to lesser known outbreaks from across history and around the world.

Plus, our resident ghost expert Alan Murdie - himself an investigator of many a poltergeist case - provides updates, analysis and commentary on the articles, helping readers to delve deeper into the ongoing mystery of these 'noisy spirits.'



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STAR POWER

SUN CYCLES AND 'SOCIETAL EXCITABILITY'

We are certainly living through troubled times, says PAUL DEVEREUX, but what if the current round of wars, assassination attempts and civil unrest is due not just to political instability but to the influence of the Sun?

The old Chinese curse "May you live in interesting times" has never been more apt than right now: a staggering number of wars, invasions, migrations, revolutions, existential political struggles, riots, death threats, assassination attempts and more all rage globally. It is an increasing welter of unrest and turmoil that has been encapsulated by one researcher in the simplistic phrase "societal excitability". It is as if the collective human id is releasing its darkest cargo all at once. This has been happening coincidently with beautiful but abnormally extensive light displays in our night skies – the aurora borealis and australis (Northern and Southern Lights) – sometimes reaching down to latitudes far below the usual polar zones. Signs and wonders indeed – but is their occurrence at about the same time as this concatenation of human events merely meaningless coincidence or an indication of something else? Some claim it is related in part to strengthening solar activity.

A RESTLESS STAR

The Sun, our local star at some 93 million miles away, is a perpetually active gaseous and electromagnetic powerhouse. It is unnecessary here to give a detailed scholarly account of its structure, but, briefly, the Sun has a core where nuclear fusion occurs, the energy from which is transferred out by radiation and convection through an outer atmospheric envelope comprising the photosphere (the bright disc we see), a homogenously linked next atmospheric layer, the chromosphere, and, after a transition zone, a corona; this is also an ever-present sheath around the Sun, but becomes visible to us as the spiky, red-speckled surrounding rim of light visible during a full solar eclipse. It looks thin to us, but is actually a couple of thousand miles deep, to give an idea of scale.

The Sun's magnetic activity levels vary according to an approximately 11-year cycle, minimum to maximum (peak of the cycle), or, roughly, a 22-year cycle from peak to peak – from a maximum through the next minimum trough of activity to the next maximum. Each peak and trough of the cycle is not a point in time but rather a *phase* that can last up to a few years, slowly building then declining. (The absolute maximum is signalled by a flip in the Sun's magnetic polarity.) The next solar maximum is due in 2025, but scientists think it is occurring earlier, because the Sun is exceptionally active at present.

In 1915 Chizhevsky became interested in the coincidence of sunspot acivity with especially dramatic human events

LEFT: Russian biophysicist and polymath Alexander Chizhevsky. **OPPOSITE:** One of the exceptional displays of auroræ experienced in 2024. This one was on 10 May, over Crosby Beach, Liverpool.

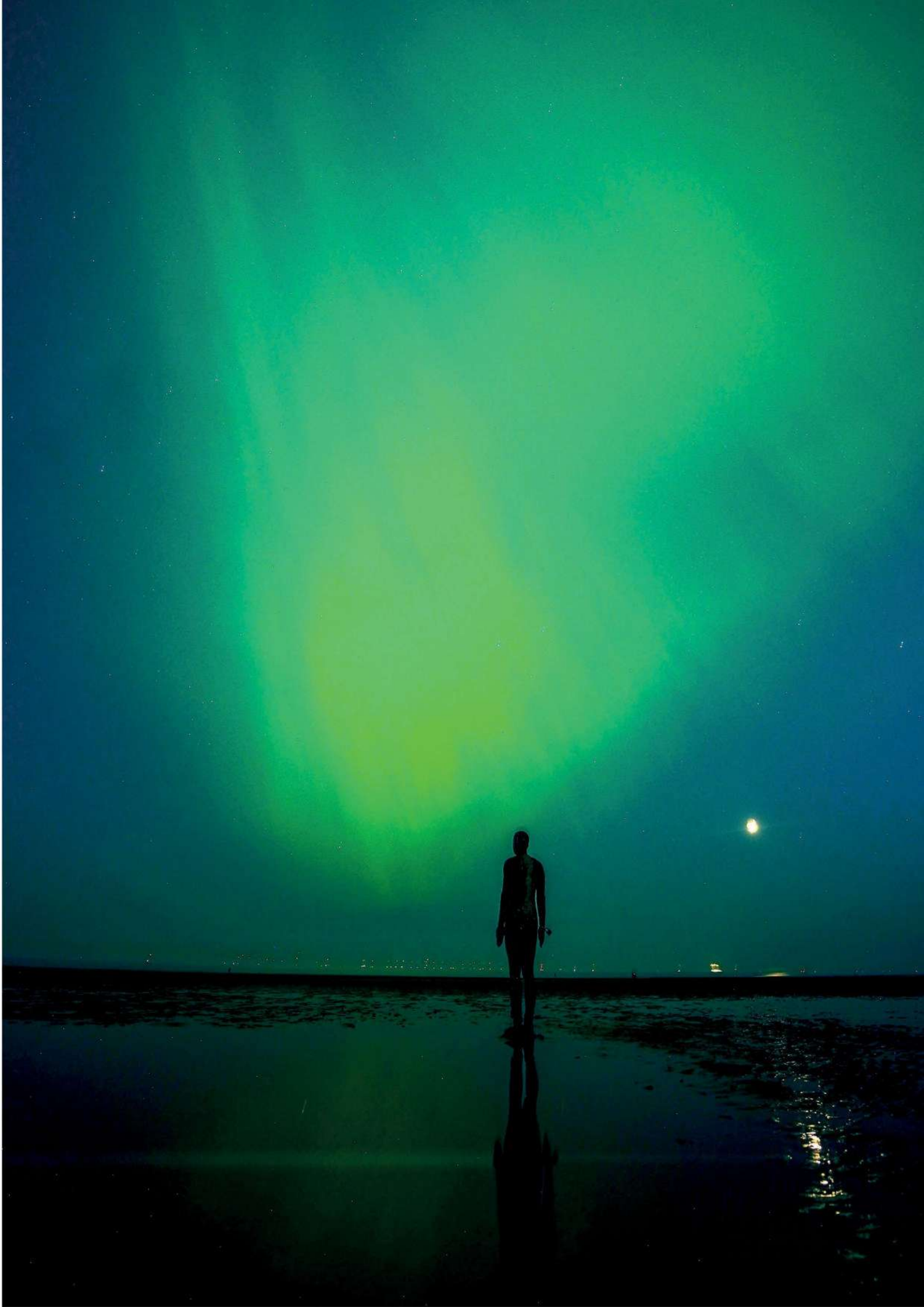
The number of sunspots appearing on the Sun's face tends to significantly increase at solar maxima, as do auroræ. Despite appearing as dark dots on the Sun's surface, sunspots are actually planet-sized chaotic magnetic ruptures caused when concentrations of energy generated by the Sun's core force their way to the gaseous solar surface. They appear dark only because they are cooler by a few thousand degrees centigrade than the surrounding solar atmosphere. These ruptures can produce conditions that create major magnetic disturbances and phenomena in the Sun's atmosphere, such as solar flares and coronal mass ejections, holes in the Sun's corona which can send streams of plasma – charged particles – outward from the Sun. If pointing in our direction, this 'solar wind' races through space and impacts the Earth's own protective magnetic field, interacting with gases in our upper atmosphere to create auroræ of various colours and, if sufficiently strong, causing electrical and radio interference down at ground level.

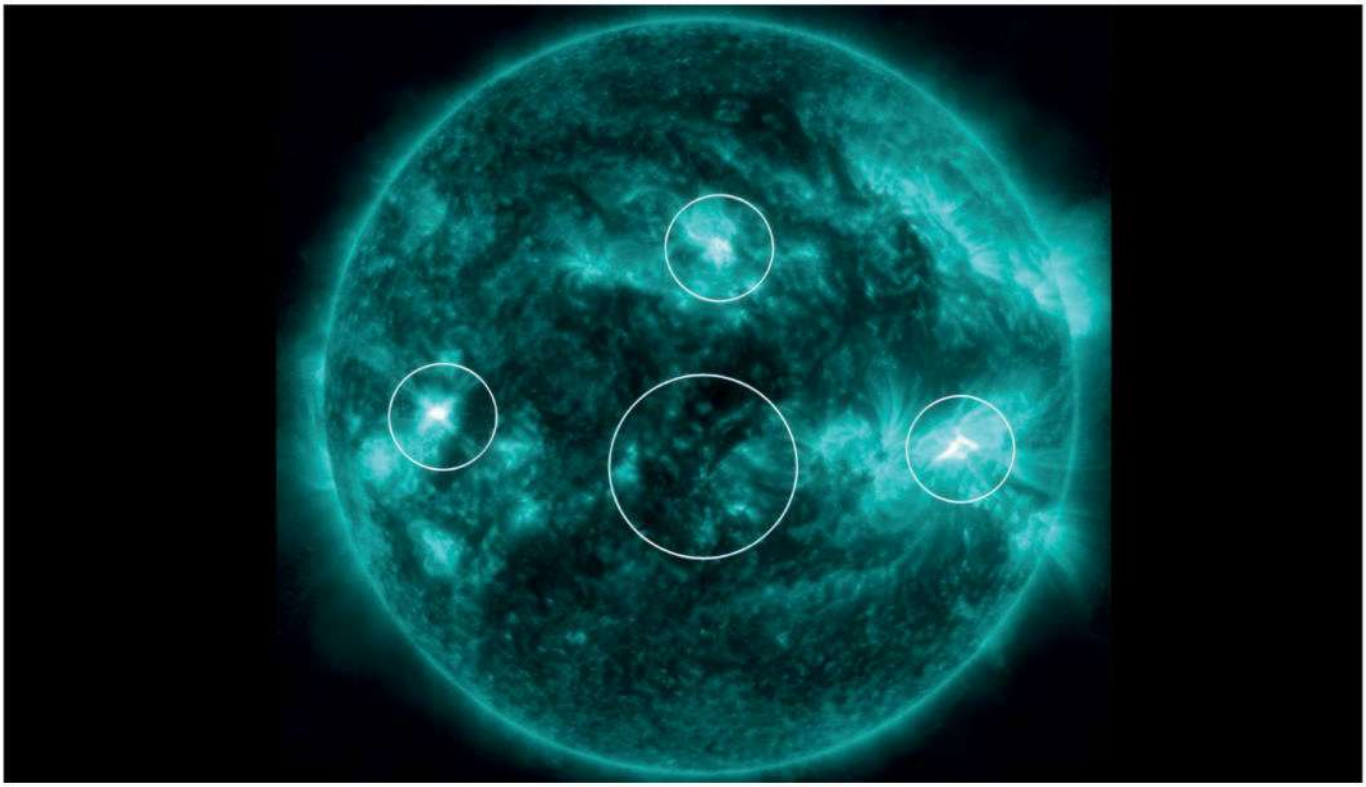
But what about effects on humanity?

A TOUCH OF THE SUN?

We know that extended and unprotected exposure to ultra-violet radiation from the Sun can be harmful, and that the Sun can have other physical effects on the body, both adverse and positive, but there has been much less study of possible larger- scale *collective* neurological effects on humanity as a whole. One man who did start to look at this in the early 20th century was the Russian biophysicist and polymath, Professor Alexander Chizhevsky (1897-1964). In 1915, he became interested in the coincidence of sunspot activity with especially dramatic human events when a large group of sunspots crossed the face of the Sun at the same time that unusually strong auroræ and

PA IMAGES / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO





NASA / SDO / AIA

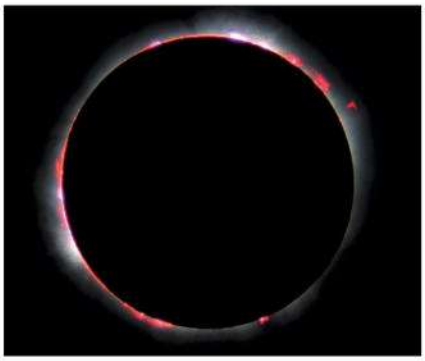
ABOVE: This is a light wavelength filtered photo of the Sun showing how energetic it currently is: solar flares (circled) erupted near-simultaneously from four separate regions of the Sun on April 23, 2024. **BELOW:** Full solar eclipse showing corona.

magnetic storms were reported. He went on over numerous years to closely study the correlation between solar activity and major human events, even drawing on data from sunspot observations dating far back in time (the Chinese, for instance, had been studying sunspots since 28 BC).

"In 1917, he [Chizhevsky] observed that the Bolshevik revolution took place close to an unusual burst of solar activity as had the abortive uprising of 1905. By 1922, he had drawn up an extraordinary chart which he claimed showed that a period of no fewer than 2,400 years of 'mass movements', including *all* major wars, battles and uprisings recorded in the history of all peoples, revealed not only regular cycles, but cycles in phase with that of the Sun. He had, he decided, hit upon a universal cycle of historical events. Periods of mass movement would rise and fall with regularity even in nations that had no contact with each other. This suggested that some external factor was causing the cycles, and the most likely such factor would be the Sun, or more precisely the forces that cause the solar cycle." [1]

Chizhevsky found that peak years of popular unrest would repeatedly coincide close to solar activity maxima. He identified, among many other examples, the French revolutions of 1789, 1830 and 1848, plus the two Russian uprisings of 1905 and 1917, all of which took place near times of solar maxima – as did the outbreak of World War II, the Communist takeovers of many of the eastern European countries, and the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. But he eventually fell out of favour with

He found that periods of unrest would repeatedly coincide with close to solar activity maxima



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the Soviet authorities, like so many others, and was sent to a labour camp. He was released around 1959, and died in 1964. To a new generation of Soviet scientists, he was respected and nicknamed "The Father of Heliobiology".

Sounding too much like astrology to the ears of Western scientists, the Russian's work has been largely ignored – but not totally. For example, Edward Russel Dewey (1895-1978), studying all kinds of cycles in economics as well as other contexts, did take a look at Chizhevsky's claims, and largely concurred with his findings. But, using richer data than that available to Chizhevsky, he was able to fine-tune those earlier findings to discover that in fact there was "a slight time-lag between peaks of mass excitability and sunspot indices, with the former peaking first." [2] Dewey figured this was due to the solar latitude in which the sunspots appeared and the latitude on Earth in which most terrestrial cycles of mass 'excitability' occurred (between 40° and 55° N, apparently).

Interest in the basic idea on which work such as Chizhevsky's is based comes around every so often. For instance, Suitbert Ertel's 1996 paper, "Space weather and revolutions: Chizhevsky's heliobiological claim scrutinized". [3] After a very detailed and extensive analysis, the German scientist concluded that: "The relationship between solar activity and violence-from-below proves to be very significant ($p < .001$). Results obtained from various controls corroborate the conclusion that the relationship is substantial." But he did emphasise that what he called "heliodependent" correlations with societal and other terrestrial environmental processes in general needed to be resolved. A paper called "Solar activity, revolutions and cultural prime in the history of mankind" [4] by Miroslav Mikulecky (1927-2015) came out in 2008. Mikulecky was a Slovak professor of internal medicine and biometrics. He cited Chizhevsky, and also Slovak philosopher E Páles, who tracked the periodic fluctuation of historical events in mutually distant geographic areas over more than three millennia. Mikulecky not only looked at disruptive

PHOTOS: PAUL DEVEREUX

LEFT: Michael Persinger wires Paul Devereux up to his 'God Helmet'. **ABOVE:** The author submits himself to 'the Octopus'– a procedure that yielded some extraordinary experiences.

human events linked with solar maxima, but also periods "of peaceful activities of masses, as science and arts, with the solar minima". He also found a recurring cycle of 500 years was prominent: his paper asked whether "a similar correlation with sunspot activity, as found for 11-year cycles, exist also in the 500- year cycling?". He studied historical data consisting of two time series concerning revolutions in Europe and China, and of eight time series from activities in science and arts registered from five geographic areas. He found that: "[T]he times of peaking were estimated for each data set. In agreement with Chizhevsky's hypothesis, revolutions culminated near to solar maxima while cultural flourishing usually distinctly near to solar minima. This conclusion is based on the level of statistical significance alpha=0.05."

Yet another example is a 2018 paper, "Long-Term Study of Heart Rate Variability Responses to Changes in the Solar and Geomagnetic Environment" [5] which expresses the contemporary trend of researching environmental factors and biomedical conditions. The authors of this paper cite Chizhevsky's work, saying that their findings support the hypothesis that energetic environmental factors can "outplay in different ways".

THE BIG QUESTION

Assuming that there actually is something to the basic ideas of Chizhevsky and followers, and that it isn't just statistical chicanery, how could it work? Most current theories revolve around the possibility that it would be by cyclical solar impact on the Earth's geomagnetic field, changes in which have a collective effect on broad swathes of human minds. Individually, these effects are very subtle, but collectively could influence responses on a societal scale.

It is scientifically known that geomagnetic field changes can affect certain animal and insect behaviour, and there is controversial experimental evidence that the human brain can sense changes in the geomagnetic field, a discussion of which is outside the scope of this current article, though I can vouch for the fact that changes in the environmental magnetic field can promote real effects in an individual's brain. A number of years ago, I was at the laboratory of the late Professor Michael Persinger (obit. **FT373:26**) in Laurentian University in Sudbury, Canada, where I sampled two of his devices. One was what the press dubbed the "God helmet", a distinctly ungodlike crash helmet that holds electrodes in place on the wearer's temples. These generate programmed patterns of weak magnetic fields that 'massage' the temporal cortex and can produce sensations of unseen presences and other strange perceptions and altered mind states. In my case, I saw glowing phosphenes (little transient lights generated naturally within the eye) take on three-dimensional sculptural forms and tumble away into a spatially vast, dark void. I found it interesting.

Following that, I was allowed to try out the then prototype of a circumcerebral magnetic stimulation (CMS) instrument they nicknamed 'the Octopus' on account of all the wires involved in the prototype. It comprised solenoids (coils) set at intervals on a headband fitted around the cranium. The solenoids are controlled by a computer programme that enables them to rotate precisely configured weak magnetic pulses around the head.

Its effect was more than merely interesting – for me, it was sensational: it enabled me to have a veridical remote perception (or telepathic) experience. For 45 minutes I had an extraordinary *sensation* of two pictures. I couldn't directly see them, but I had one recurring impression of a large multicoloured object, with bright green being the predominant colour, that I guessed might be a fairground stall, and the other a persistent sensation in my visual centre that I interpreted as two telegraph poles silhouetted against a sunset sky. I couldn't shake off these two 'images', and I reported them to the experimenters at the time.

After the session I was taken to a distant room where, unknown to me, my wife had previously been asked to select one of six large envelopes and to take a photo out of the one she chose. She didn't see any of the photos in the other envelopes. She was further asked to concentrate on her chosen photograph and think what I might say about it. All six photographs were shown to me for the first time. I saw two of them that matched my persistent image sensations during the 'Octopus' session. One photo was of an old American locomotive painted in variegated colours, with a bright green cow-catcher on its front, and the other was of the two very dominant Sudbury chimney stacks silhouetted against a sunset. It was the locomotive my wife had selected, but nobody could explain why I 'saw' the other as well. (For more on Persinger, the God Helmet and the 'Octopus', see **FT42:50-54, 201:39, 205:4, 270:55, 286:44**).

I have no idea if this experience has anything to do with a cyclically solar energised geomagnetic field, but it is enough to prevent me dismissing out of hand the idea that our powerful Sun, like a puppet master controlling its orbiting planets, might be able to make the minds of Earth's inhabitants dance to its flux of energies.

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1 Guy Lyon Playfair & Scott Hill, *The Cycles of Heaven*, 1978.

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PAUL DEVEREUX is a long-time contributor to FT and one of its archæology columnists. The author of many books and an active researcher on ancient acoustics and anomalous phenomena, he was co-founding editor of *Time & Mind* academic journal.

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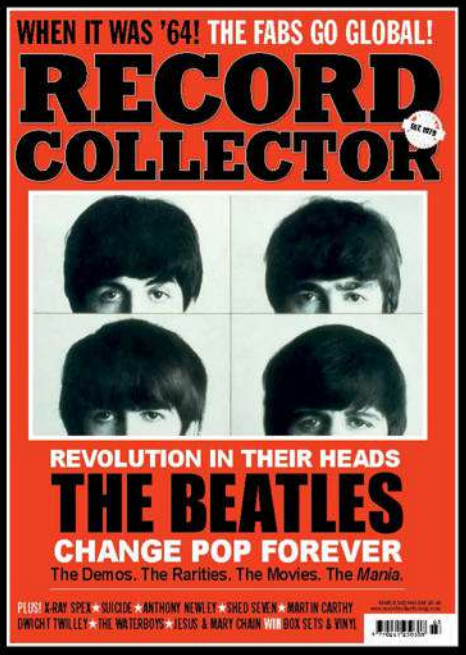
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Oh, whittle, and I'll come to you…

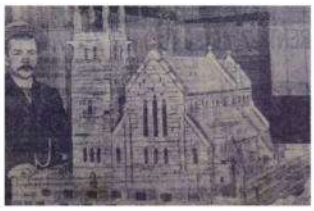
ROB GANDY celebrates the matchless talents of a West Midlands whittling legend.

Everyone will have seen films where some character, usually out in the wilds, is sitting with a knife idly sculpting a piece of wood into some purposeful shape or other. This practice is called whittling, which has clear differences from carving: it can only be accomplished with a knife and must be done in the hand – there can be no holding device or "sanding down". Its heyday was probably from the mid-19th to the mid-20th centuries, when it was taught to boy scouts and similar groups. It has been called the common man's 'folk art' because it was done by people without academic education in the arts, but who still had a creative urge and ability.

It came to pass that a man was crowned the whittling champion of the USA after creating a 53-foot-(16m) long wooden chain in 147 hours. But when he became aware of this feat, Samuel Wilkes, from Tipton in the West Midlands, who was born on 21 April 1860, decided that he could easily beat it. After all, his party piece was to transform a single matchstick into a length of chain with individual links. So he crossed the Atlantic to issue his challenge (although the date is unknown), and what Wilkes conjured from a plank that was 10ft long, 1ft wide and 1.5in thick (300cm x 30cm x 3.8cm) was truly remarkable. He whittled it into an 82ft (25m) chain with 472 links. And to cap this, he created a ball at the chain's centre and a hook on either end. Arguably, he was just showing off!

He returned home to great acclaim as 'World Champion', but his prowess was not limited to wood. He made several working models of steam engines inserted in large bottles, which sprang to life if a penny was inserted in the slot. His pieces were exhibited at home and abroad, and raised money for Guest Hospital, Dudley, where Wilkes was presented to the Duke of York (later George VI) on the opening of the hospital's 1925 bazaar.

The model of St Michael's Church was built from 9,000 matchboxes



Arguably Wilkes's greatest achievement was a scale model of St Michael's Church, Tividale, unveiled in 1903, which he built from 9,000 empty matchboxes. Readers might conjecture what happened to the matches. However, because he lent it out to people, such as a funfair, the church model inevitably got damaged; and because Wilkes was such a perfectionist, he smashed up his labour of love in a fit of pique.

Wilkes couldn't read or write, and worked metal as a galvaniser and planisher. But he was clearly something of a genius when it came to using his hands. When interviewed on the occasion of his golden wedding anniversary, Sam explained that he was entirely self-taught: "All my life I've been wood-carving, but I've never had anyone teach me, nor even to sharpen my knives. I can remember as a lad how I always used to be cutting my fingers, and my parents were always threatening to throw my knives into the fire because of that. I loved doing the work so much that neither cuts nor threats could make me give it up."

Wilkes and his wife had 15 children, although not all lived to full adulthood, and when he died in 1933, aged 72, he was buried at Tipton Cemetery, with his carvings divided among the children. Eventually, the great length of chain, along with three of Sam's models in bottles, were donated to Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. Surprisingly, these remarkable pieces have never been displayed publicly and are kept in store. Nevertheless, his great-granddaughter still has one of the matchstick chains preserved in a glass vial.

The artists of today with their unmade beds and sheep suspended in formaldehyde are all very well, but can any of them (ahem) match the skills of Samuel Wilkes…

LEFT: Samuel Wilkes with his record-breaking chain made of matchsticks. **BELOW LEFT:** Samuel with his model of St Michael's Church, and Sam and family with one of his steam engines in a bottle.

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ROB GANDY is a Visiting Professor at Liverpool Business School, Liverpool John Moores University and an FT regular.

The pay-per-view séance

KATE CHERRELL returns to resurrect another largely forgotten, and largely embarrassing, story of celebrity contact from beyond the grave

Before the age of Internet livestreams and social media's séance-on-tap capabilities, options for viewing questionable examples of spirit contact were limited. Prior to the domination of *Most Haunted* and *Ghost Adventures*, chatting to the dead on television was limited to occasional fluff pieces tagged onto talk shows – a faith healer here, a spoon-bender there. However, with the turn of the Millennium and the digital revolution came the re-branding and re-popularisation of pay-per-view content.

Primarily known for sporting events and movies playing on a continuous loop, the American 'Viewers' Choice' pay-per-view service jumped feet-first into the year 2000 with a trendy rebrand as iNDEMAND. Clutching a Prince concert, 'Rave Un2 The Year 2000', they diversified their œuvre, offering ring sports, adult material and even more looped films.

As smaller production companies explored the lucrative, developing world of special-interest DVD releases, few had turned their attention towards the possibilities of pay-per-view. Boxing and wrestling matches were pulling in millions of dollars on a weekly basis, with few overheads; all you needed was a unique event and a finished product to sell – throw a celebrity name into the mix, and you had a money-printing machine.

One person who spotted the celebrity-based hole in the market was Paul Sharratt, an English-born entertainer and producer.

WHY DID DIANA WRITE THE LETTER TO PAUL BURRELL FORTELLING HER OWN DEATH?
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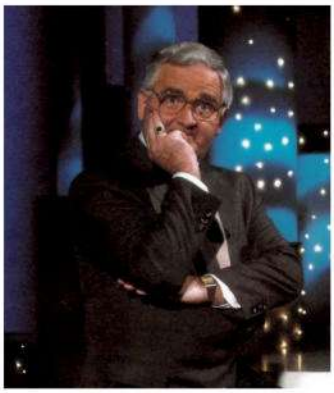


After founding production company Starcast in 1965, he enjoyed a successful career in Australia, primarily producing documentaries, serials and live events, racking up a substantial number of awards. He was the face and media contact for much of his output, a trait that was further galvanised during his dalliance with pay-per-view.

Later in his career, Sharratt had entered the world of unofficial, straight-to-video documentaries, many loosely tied into popular TV and films of the time. 2007's *American Idol: Unauthorised* and 2005's *Angels and Demons Revealed* followed the template of the modern-day mockbuster, using relevant buzzwords to entice fans of a franchise into buying low-cost, cash-in products.

Sharratt was more than aware that licensing celebrity content was a prohibitive affair, leaving tiny profit margins and strict regulations in its wake. But to produce an *unofficial* product side-steps these charges. To ensure even more creative freedom, make sure the subject of your creativity is six foot underground, and you're onto a winner.

By combining 'unofficial' celebrity products with a growing public interest in the supernatural and spirituality, Sharratt created the pay-per-view séance template, and wrung it dry over two pay-per-view releases in 2003 and 2006. By 2006, Paranormal TV was well established on both sides of the Atlantic, and a third séance may have been the costly investment that spoilt the spectral broth.

Sharratt's seminal séance offering was *The Spirit of Diana*, a 90-minute documentary, headed by husband and wife psychic team Jane and Craig Hamilton-Parker chronicling the final days of the

BELOW: Paul Sharratt, mastermind of the pay-per-view séance.

People's Princess. Released on 9 March 2003, it would propel Sharratt's name to tabloid fame. Presented with all the sensitivity of a gut punch, *The Spirit of Diana* is a veritable car crash of a production, where a taxi ride through the same tunnel in which Di lost her life is presented as an ideal means for a chat with residual energies. As the psychics approach the fateful tunnel, insightful comments such as "What a dirty place to die", "I feel like I'm being chased" and the garbled "I'm getting newspaper men and all things that are happening" hammer home why neither of Sharratt's productions were endorsed or acknowledged by the families involved.

Diana's own dubious dabblings with spirituality and astrology were utilised as foundations for the séance, with her tenuous links to left-field beliefs presented as implied permission for the whole event. Indeed, in her younger years, Diana was said to have predicted her father's stroke, but rather more bizarrely, to have also anticipated that Charles's horse would go into cardiac arrest; both clear signs of Diana's immersion in the occult, surely?

For every "remarkable séance" and reference to the presence of Diana's psychic energy, there is a tabloid narrative, speculating on the nature and longevity of her relationship with Dodi Fayed. Stranger still, the film crew were given permission to enter Dodi's luxurious Paris apartment – perfectly preserved since his death – in order to strengthen contact with his spirit. Yet from this privileged and emotionally-charged location, the psychic benefits were few, and Craig Hamilton-Parker's insight reached its peak with, "The magazines he would have read. The sweets. I see he likes lollipops."

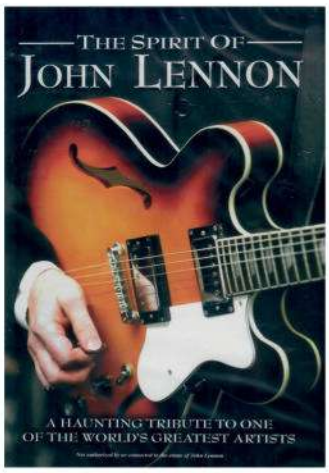
After learning that the pair had intended to marry and that

Diana was enjoying some quality time with Mother Theresa in the afterlife, it's little wonder that *The Spirit of Diana* was universally slammed by news outlets around the world, with its creators and audience labelled by some as "ghouls" and "loolahs". [1]

Despite *The Spirit of Diana's* crass exploitation of the dead, it was an incredibly lucrative exercise. Reportedly, over half a million Americans paid $14.95 to tune into the pay-per-view event, grossing an estimated $20 million. This doesn't take into account the profits made from the tie-in DVD released worldwide shortly thereafter (and now found on eBay for a couple of quid). For such a low-budget production, the profit margins were enormous. As costs were limited to a medium, a few flights, a camera and a former Avenger (a presenting credit that fans of Patrick Macnee often overlook), it would be a format replicated by many paranormal television shows well into the new millennium.

Keen to cash in on this success, Sharratt set aside any fears of instant karma, and began working on his sophomore offering, a séance with another pop-and-peace icon, John Lennon. Described by *The Sunday World* as "the tasteful practice of flogging a dead rock star", *The Spirit of John Lennon* was released on iNDEMAND in April 2006, and similarly made headlines worldwide for its unauthorised and somewhat unwelcome content.

Offered at $9.95, quite the reduction from Diana's outing, *The Spirit of John Lennon* was streamed on iNDEMAND to a smaller, but not insubstantial, audience of millions. Despite not making as big an impact as the late princess's séance, *The Spirit of John Lennon* possessed a claim that Diana could never replicate, either side of death: at the end of the séance, the programme would reveal a brand new, exclusive John Lennon song. It was channelled via the late Beatle himself and recorded by the living; all one had to do was pay the fee and sit through 90 minutes of questionable spirit contact before John would return to us once more.



Prior to the programme's debut (and subsequent DVD release) attitudes towards the séance were abundantly clear in the media, on Beatles message boards and, most notably, from Yoko Ono and the estate of John Lennon. As the press junket for the séance began, Lennon's friend and family spokesman Elliot Mintz issued a statement, condemning the séance as "tacky, exploitative and far removed" from Lennon's morals, adding that "a pay-per-view séance was never his style." [2] He would go on to say that Sharratt's spectral offering was "another example of the misuse of John's affirmation of life opposed to the preoccupation of his death." [3]

But what are a few disgruntled relatives between séances? Regardless of the Lennon family's distaste for the event, the publicity drive for *The Spirit of John Lennon* was led by the promise of a shocking example of EVP (electronic voice phenomena) capturing a message of Lennon's from beyond the grave. Yet before the audience were permitted to hear John or his heavenly new song, the 90 minute programme took viewers on a world tour of Beatles-adjacent locations, from Liverpool hairdressers to Central Park and deep into the Himalayas. These visits were supposedly psychically-focused, with a view to tapping into any residual energy of the former Beatle, but in truth they did little but fill time.

Scouse medium Joe Power led proceedings through Liverpool and New York, remarking that Tony Slavin's Hairdressers felt "quite mystical", before psychically revealing that a tap was dripping upstairs and a toilet didn't work… "but it does now". His psychic revelations took a more distasteful edge in Manhattan, where a carriage ride with the spirits of John Lennon and George Harrison was followed by a blow-by-blow account of Lennon's murder. A string of séances – including one by trance medium Patricia Bankins, which revealed that Lennon described heaven as "what you *imagine*" – deliver little insight into Lennon's life. Like much evidence presented from contemporary ghost-hunting equipment, the much-anticipated EVP was discovered in a microphone glitch, where the distorted audio is said to contain Lennon's spectral voice. Sadly, the Beatle's diction has deteriorated since entering the spirit world, but thanks to the powers of modern sound editing software, a mumble becomes "Peace… the message is peace"; at least if you strain your ears. Speaking to the *Times*, Sharratt said: "It gives you a shiver down the spine. It's very, very clear." He obviously had far better hearing than the rest of the audience, but it can't be said that Sharratt didn't believe in his product.

The inevitable conclusion of *The Spirit of John Lennon* is the unveiling of his newly-channelled heavenly song. Decades after his untimely death, has Lennon's songwriting prowess continued or developed in the afterlife? In short, no. Following a prolonged visit to a Himalayan guru who claimed to regularly channel the musician through his sitar, the music was translated and re-recorded by an American studio. The resulting ditty is little more than an inoffensive middle-of-the-road affair, more akin to children's TV than the pop charts. While popularity of "Imagine" lies in its simplicity, it still possessed more nuance than John's spectral couplets of "everyone lives, everyone dies, everyone loves, everyone cries." While channelling deceased musicians is a questionable tradition enjoyed by mediums and psychics since the 19th century, this segment of pop culture spirituality provides little insight into after-death existence. What it does provide is the song "Peace", and for all of its ghostly virtues, it's definitely more of an album track than a single.

While *The Spirit of John Lennon* made few shockwaves in the world of Beatles fans, paranormal enthusiasts or pay-per-view subscribers, its place in the history of celebrity-worship and popular Spiritualism is secured. Para-social relationships are an inherent part of the celebrity/consumer cycle, but clearly do not finish at the point of death, merely transforming into a new phase in which personal ideas, beliefs and senses of self can be projected onto a heavenly blank slate.

Today, live-streamed séances are commonplace; as soon as a celebrity death is suggested by a media outlet, séances and EVP sessions hit social media before the undertakers have parked their hearse. In 2022, Queen Elizabeth II's death notice had barely been secured to the gates of Buckingham Palace before mediums and paranormal enthusiasts were claiming that they had evidence of her chatting freely with her loyal subjects from the other side.

Sadly, Paul Sharratt passed away in 2009, signalling the end of his celebrity séance reign. While he may not be remembered as one of the century's great filmmakers, his contribution to paranormal history, celebrity culture and griefsploitation is undeniable. We can only imagine what séances would have reached DVD bargain bins had he lived longer (a chat with Gandhi or a natter with Marilyn?), but we should be grateful for his brief dalliance with the supernatural and his questionable legacy of the pay-per-view séance – as unique and unforgettable as a haunted scouse hairdressers.

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KATE CHERRELL is a writer and academic specialising in 19th century Spiritualism. She curates the blog BurialsandBeyond.com

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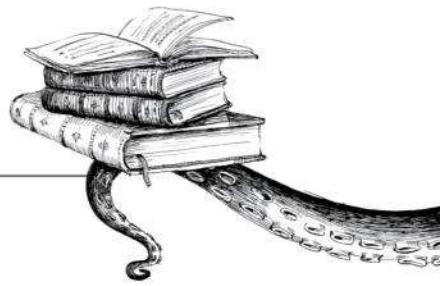


Charles Fort – a man of letters

Fort's correspondence reveals much about his philosophical journey and evolving theories about the cosmos, says **Bob Rickard** – and also about his methodology and his contrarian opinions

Letters of the Damned

The Forgotten Investigations of Charles Fort

Ed. Chris Aubeck

Independently published (Amazon) 2024
Pb, £14.85, 376pp, ISBN 9798327836426

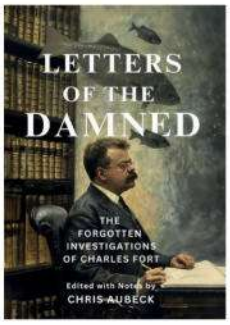
Chris Aubeck is a veteran fortean with a focus upon pre-1947 UFO-like phenomena. He founded the online archival research hub Magonia Exchange and was midwife to its sister group Forteana Exchange. He has also written several important historical surveys of what might be called "fortean ufology" including *Wonders of the Sky* (2010) with Jacques Vallée.

His latest project is an anthology of 71 letters written by Fort to newspapers between June 1924 and October 1926. This is the period in which Fort and his wife Anna rented a flat in Marchmont Street, off Russell Square, London, not 10 minutes' walk from the British Museum. These letters – most of which will be new even to veteran forteans – were retrieved by Aubeck from online archives and are trancribed here with explanatory notes, a brief chronology and biography, lists of sources and, Fort be praised, an index.

Read sequentially, they reveal much about Fort's philosophical journey and evolving theories about the cosmos. They also present a fresh view of Fort's methodology and contrarian "opinions", as he pursued stories that caught his eye while researching in the British Museum Library.

This "Marchmont period" begins shortly after *New Lands* was published (1923) and many letters deal with the types of phenomena Fort had already introduced in his first two books (*Book of the Damned* and *New Lands*) … but he was also, at this time, chasing reports on subjects that would appear later in his last two books (*Lo!* and *Wild Talents*).

Aubeck likens Fort's prodigious letter-writing to an early form of "crowd-sourced research". Fort began each letter with a classic case and summarised any attempts to explain it. He then reveals that he has discovered many more such incidents, noting that not only were "experts" confounded, but there were also no real attempts to correlate or study the data. Besides appealing to the paper's editor to publish his summary account, he also invited anyone to write to him if they had any related information supporting his notions or (and this is important) that refuted them.



As most of the letters follow the same formula, Aubeck has redacted much repetition. Fort's (few) errors are usefully corrected by Aubeck's own diligent research, managing to trace, say, the object that fell or the people involved. For example, Fort repeats his regret that after collecting a great many accounts of falls of hundreds, even thousands, of tiny frogs, he could find none of tadpoles falling; Aubeck dutifully produces one, and we have printed others in FT over the years. I see such lapses not so much as a fault in the man, but of the limitation of his time and resources. This book is a prime example of the riches modern researchers can access in today's Internet archives.

"By curbing his eccentricities", Fort avoided being ignored as a "crank"

Be prepared, though; as the Fort we thought we knew is refleshed in his own words. As Aubeck reveals, there is a clear distinction between Fort's provocative prose style, familiar from his books, and these more cautious appeals to both editors and the newspaper readers. Fort's "wit, humour and enthusiasm" are still in evidence, writes Aubeck, but "by curbing his eccentricities", Fort avoided being ignored as a "crank". This may turn out to be one of the more significant aspects of Aubeck's research.

For example, in a letter to the editor of the Springfield *Republican*, Fort summarises the "mysterious travelling lights in the sky" in December 1909, reported from locations from New England to Alabama, sometimes described as "an object or construction". "If I had only 10-15 such seeming visits by explorers from other inhabited worlds I should be impressed," writes Fort, "but I have 50 such, all in modern times." Then he adds: "The datum makes it difficult for those who try to find uninteresting explanations."

Aubeck also tackles the tricky question of whether Fort "believed" his eccentric theories. There is some evidence in the letters that he chose to write-up many of his "datums" as examples of "a purposeful distribution" in Nature – think of falls of frogs, or appearances and disappearances, mass migrations, or even "bombardment of this earth 'as if' from stable positions above". While he famously said he didn't believe his own theories, Aubeck correctly points out that Fort also "didn't say [they] were nonsense or trivial".

It is more productive, Aubeck concludes, to see Fort's works "as a metaphorical attack on entrenched thinking … a 'what if' exercise". If anything, Fort's commitment to the search for evidence of anomalies (and anomalistic evidence) was far more important to him than proving anything one way or the other … and it continues to inspire today's forteans, regardless of the diversity of their interpretations.

In another letter, Fort makes a fascinating observation on his writing style, calling it "subjectivism". "It is the attempt to produce in writing the way in which the mind receives impressions; that is fragmentarily, often without detail, often with vividness of a single detail, and jumping from one thing to another (like post-impressionist painters)."

Readers may also be surprised by the proliferation of monochrome illustrations in a book of letters. They vary in various styles, from those by Alexander King for the original *Lo!* (1928), photos from period news accounts, contemporary portraits, and AI-assisted creations from prompts provided by Aubeck. Of these latter, the high-resolution colour image of Charles Fort at his desk – used on this book's cover – is particularly poignant.

Here, then, is the authentic voice of Charles Fort, hailed by Aubeck as "the first proper ufologist" and one of the most unorthodox thinkers of the 20th century. Chris Aubeck is to be congratulated for publishing this valuable addition to fortean studies, which every fortean will welcome and appreciate.

★★★★★

Changeling folklore

It's a lot more complex than simply fairies swapping babies, says **Jeremy Harte**

The Medieval Changeling

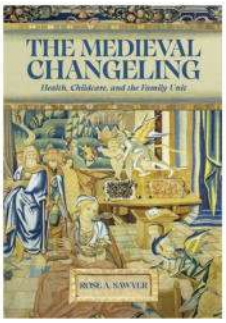
Health, Childcare and the Family Unit

Rose A Sawyer

DS Brewer 2023

Hb, 253pp, £80, ISBN 9781843846512

Once there were no changelings. Mothers slept without fear of an elfish look-alike replacing their little ones. But the belief existed by the 11th century, and was widespread in the 19th. What happened? There is a history of the fear that your child might be taken; another of the rituals for



dealing with actual children thought to be exchanged; and yet another of the stories which may endorse the fear and the ritual, or may just be entertainment. These three things are not all the same.

Hardly any mediæval texts about changelings survive. The educated never accepted them as a plausible explanation for childhood deformity – unlike witchcraft, where scholars eventually put their weight behind the folk view. Sawyer breaks new ground studying the lives of Saints Stephen, Bartholomew and Lawrence, all of them carried off as babies: by demons, of course, because these are holy not folk stories, but the demons do most of what fairies will later perform. Sometimes they leave behind an *ydolum*, or as folklorists would say, a stock, and then, just as in popular tradition, this is burnt. The saint, who has grown up elsewhere, comes back and compels the baby-demon to speak, as a travelling piper or tailor does in folktales. People evidently knew much that was not in the hagiographies, because pictures show motifs, such as the changeling-demon exhausting wetnurses, which are not in the texts.

Is the changeling an old fairy, or a baby one? Folklore is contradictory about this, whereas the saints' lives make better sense with their age-old demon pretending to be a baby. In mediæval hagiography and modern folktale alike, the changeling is not in danger, whereas in mediæval and early modern practice, the changeling-child definitely was. Saints are abandoned in the wilderness and miraculously found by holy men, while real babies were taken away to lonely places and we are not so sure what happened to them afterwards. But the saint stories are not about child-murder; as in modern accounts of people who grew up labelled as changelings, the strange little thing is looked after. Sawyer is more interested in real human children than in elves. Both narratives and pictures go out of their way to contrast good childcare with bad: the saint-baby is stolen because nobody is taking any notice of him, while the demon-baby survives to feature later in the story because his adoptive parents have looked after what must have been a challenging foster-child. Though changeling stories raise the spectre of abandonment, they are also testimonies to parental care and affection.

All the words that originally meant "changeling" (*cambio, cangun, skiftingr, wechselkind*) drifted semantically to mean something like "mentally disabled", until the original sense was lost altogether. Today the changeling has become a poster child for disability and neurodivergent rights. Like all political movements this requires a myth – "They used to murder people like us. Never again!" – which over-simplifies a complex history: imaginary long-ago children make a poor match for living disability activists.

★★★★★

Andreas Vesalius

Anatomy and the World of Books

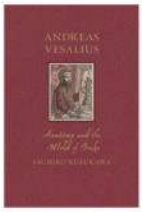
Sachiko Kusukawa

Reaktion 2024

Hb, 272pp, £17.95, ISBN 9781789148527

The traditional view of the history of anatomy is simple: in the beginning was Andreas Vesalius. Popular perception holds that Vesalius's *De Fabrica Humani Corporis* (On the Fabric of the Human Body) revolutionised anatomical knowledge after its publication in 1543, discarding understandings of the body based on Ancient Greek guesswork, overturning mediæval laws against human dismemberment and ushering in a world of medical learning based on methodical and careful dissection.

As is often the way, things were a bit more complicated than that. There were no religious-inspired laws against dissection in mediæval Europe's universities. Vesalius



sought to refine ancient medical knowledge through anatomical means and not to discard it entirely. And even though Vesalius's book did lead to groundbreaking changes in our understanding of the body, this was by no means an overnight process – for all its fame, the book was only fully translated into English in the 2000s.

The creation and reception of *De Fabrica* is the subject of this book. It is published as part of Reaktion's excellent "Renaissance Lives" series, and offers an elegant and knowledgeable entry point to the subject in question – even if in this instance, it is as much about the life of Vesalius's book as about the man himself.

Kusukawa's account of *De Fabrica*'s famous images of the human body is particularly skilled, not just in how carefully she unpicks their creation and verisimilitude but also in showing how *De Fabrica*'s harmonious arrangement of text and image was pioneering.

De Fabrica was central to Vesalius's "Renaissance Life", but for all its size and scale – over 700 large folio-sized pages – it was not the summation of a career but, as Kusukawa makes clear, designed to kickstart one. As she states: "The book was an elaborate job application," opening, as it did, with a letter addressed to Charles V, Holy Roman Emperor, the most powerful ruler in Europe. After he sent him a copy, the 29-year-old Vesalius was appointed one of Charles's physicians, securing a privileged lifestyle and a guaranteed reputation.

His rise through society – and his confidence – is also borne out in the sections of *De Fabrica*, which give accounts of his search for cadavers – not only from execution gibbets but also from tombs and ossuaries (entered after the forging of keys).

Elegant and authoritative, Kusukawa's book is a perfect introduction both to Vesalius and to the world in which he was able to socially climb – and transform – through his glorious yet somewhat gory medical masterpiece.

Ross MacFarlane

★★★★

Encounters

Experiences with Non-Human Intelligences

DW Pasulka

St Martin's Essentials 2023

Hb, 248pp, £21.99, ISBN 9781250879561

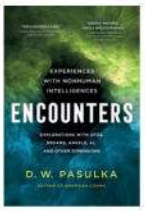
DW Pasulka, a professor of religious studies, has come to the business of ufology by an unusual route. After studying miraculous events in Christian history, which, she notes, include sightings of "aerial beings of light, miraculous flying houses, monks and nuns who levitate and bilocate", she felt "the shift to the study of UFO cultures seemed straightforward." This is both a strength and a weakness; she comes to the phenomena unburdened by involvement in factional ufology, but tends to see UFOs through the lens of "spiritual reality" informed by her background in religion.

Pasulka is, however, very good at taking a neutral posture on non-human intelligence (NHI) as perceived through the medium of UFOs and is just as happy talking to abductees as she is to SETI researchers. Her analysis is also useful, bringing a hefty chunk of philosophy, cultural studies and anthropology to the table.

Her work is informed by a questing curiosity, and her outsider status means she is happy to explore less well known but perhaps more informative encounters than a standard ufology text. These

include a senior research scientist whose alien encounter strikes Pasulka as being more like a vision of St Michael, while a working-class Mexican experiences repeated visits from demons that are more like UFO sightings.

In addition, she throws interesting light on the secret world of military research, and how that might interface with ufology, including noting that much of the UFO-related info in that community seems to be transmitted via oral tradition, rather than through formal routes, which may explain why UFO "whistleblowers" are great at "someone told me" tales, and terrible at producing anything of substance.



In the end, though, her conclusions are betrayed by her outsider status. Her key takeaways are that UFO and alien encounters aren't like their media portrayals, that instead they often have supernatural and paranormal elements and often profoundly change experiencers' lives, which can lead to strange dreams, repeated encounters, and access to what they believe is hidden knowledge. She also comes to realise that there are groups who act behind the scenes to manage information about UFOs, and that's pretty much it.

Any fortean is likely to go "Well, yes, and…," but the journey is worth taking with her for the scenery on the way, even if the destination is disappointing.

Ian Simmons

★★★

Wonderstruck

How Wonder and Awe Shape the Way We Think

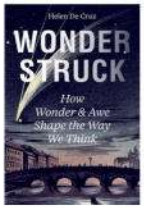
Helen De Cruz

Princeton University Press 2024

Hb, 232pp, £22, ISBN 9780691232126

Wonder and awe are essential to philosophy, religion, science, magic and life itself – so argues Helen De Cruz. *Wonderstruck* is rich and readable. Forteans are surely no strangers to wonder and awe. But what are these? Awe, argues De Cruz, is the emotion we feel when we encounter vastness, of time or space. Awe must be "accommodated", which gets our cognitive engine going. Wonder is the emotion we can feel upon glimpsing "unknown terrain" lying beyond the edges of current understanding.

De Cruz happily rejects a crude dualism of reason and emotion. Our emotions are central to enquiry and can be cultivated – we feel as well as think our way to truth. Chapter 2 describes roles or wonder in philosophy, which can be a source of wonder, too, if done right. I'd wager a fortean style of wonder emphasises a sense of strangeness, as well as the nicer things, such as joy. Chapter 3 discusses the psychology of wonder and awe. Lots of good examples – from art appreciation to Micronesian sea navigation. Wonder and awe, in an evolutionary sense, help us meet our needs, but also, if used well, offer us ways to "transcend" ourselves.



Chapter 4 moves onto magic, both in "occult" and stage forms. Humans need to experience wonder; for De Cruz, magic arose from an effort to grant ourselves "abilities to produce wonders". If so, what explains this need? Examples from fantasy and science fiction fill out the chapter. Some forteans will want a deeper dive into the history of magic and occultism. What's missing is the point that occult magic has a different worldview – a vision of a reality different from the scientific one.

Chapter 5 broadens out into relations between religion, awe, and wonder. For De Cruz, we must try to resensitise ourselves to wonder. Familiarity brings insensibility. The beliefs and practices of religion can sustain wonder and awe. Disenchantment is personal as well as cultural. Chapter 6, on science, opens with ball lightning and asks whether science should dissolve or sustain a sense of wonder. She ends optimistically. Wonder is "wholesome" and motivates environmental concern. I'd add that we can also wonder at human depravity and awfulness.

The book ends with questions. Is our sense of wonder dimming? Maybe modern people are too overworked, alienated from nature, and distracted by social media to wonder well.

Wonderstruck is a thoughtful, eclectic, enjoyable exploration of the varieties of wonder and awe. It's a nice fit for forteanism, too – wondering at the weird, after all, is what we do.

Ian Kidd

★★★★

Facts Concerning HP Lovecraft and his Environs

Gary Lachman & Grey Haas

Herb Lester Associates 2024

Map & sleeve, £12, ISBN 9781739339715

Herb Lester Associates put out travel guides and fold-out infographic maps in a mid-century, retro style. They also have a line in literary and esoteric guides, including *Aleister Crowley's Britain* and *Occult London*. A map of Lovecraft and the environs of his life and fiction makes sense given the author's relentlessly topographic imagination.

The Lovecraft map is presented in a sleeve with a garish pulp magazine vibe, promising lurid thrills within. The map folds out to lay out Lovecraft's home town, Providence, Rhode Island, where he was born and lived most of his life in the pristinely preserved 18th-century streets that sit on the hill up to the campus of Brown, which became Lovecraft's Miskatonic University in his fiction. Lovecraft's cosmic visions were always in tension with this hyperlocalism, living out his antiquarian dreams amidst pre-Revolutionary houses, a conservative instinct that aligned with his politics.

Two other maps show Lovecraft's New York, during his stay in 1924-6, the period of his failed marriage and steady slide down through the rental market until he ended up on the borders of Red Hook in Brooklyn. Then one of the world's largest docks, the experience of New York fed Lovecraft's horror of "alien" migrants pouring into the city. The other map tracks Lovecraft's journeys up and down the eastern seaboard of America, from the small New England towns that became Innsmouth or Dunwich or Kingsport in his stories to extended trips as far north as Quebec and as far south as the Florida Keys. He always took extensive notes, jotted down names from old graveyards, and generally indulged in a self-conscious form of rustication. The range of his travels is useful to see, to belie the notion that Lovecraft was just a reclusive dreamer trapped in genteel poverty in Providence.

The reverse side of the map has a timeline and explanatory text panels. The whole shebang is briefly diverting: a neat gift, perhaps, for the Lovecraftian cosmic nihilist in your life who already has the Cthulhu baseball cap or the Elder Ones "No Lives Matter" T-shirt.

Roger Luckhurst

★★★

Escape From Shadow Physics

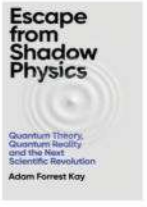
Quantum Theory, Quantum Reality and the Next Scientific Revolution

Adam Forrest Kay

Weidenfeld & Nicolson 2024

Hb, 496pp, £25, ISBN 9781399609586

Kay's mission is to challenge current scientific orthodoxy, and as that's something Charles Fort was famous for doing you might think it makes this a fortean book. But things have changed a lot since Fort's time, and the orthodoxy that Kay takes exception to is the standard interpretation of quantum theory. He describes this as "anti-realist", and characterises it with phrases like "the mind creates the physical world" and "the Moon isn't there when nobody looks at it" – the very aspects of quantum physics that give it such fascination for forteans, New Agers, SF writers and the like. But Kay takes a different view, believing that even the weirdest quantum phenomena can be interpreted in the hard-nosed rationalist terms of classical, 19th-century physics – the very kind that Charles Fort hated so much. Kay writes with a single-minded clarity and enthusiasm that will doubtless appeal to readers who agree with him – while infuriating those who don't. I suspect most forteans will be in the latter category.



Andrew May

★★★

Tales of time slips

Jerry Glover explores a plethora of experiences of high weirdness and synchronicity and their possible causes

Weird Time

Exploring The Mysteries of Time and Space

Ed. Tim R Swartz & Sean Casteel

Zontar Press 2024

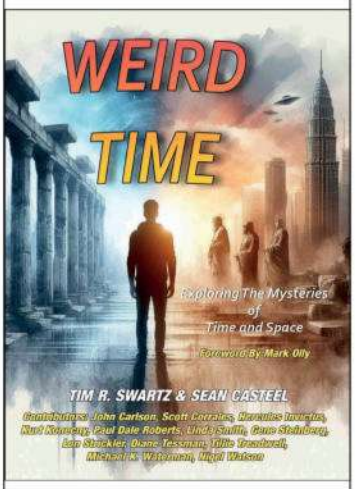
Pb, 363pp, £14.79, ISBN 9798986644936

Just when "weird" goes mainstream in US politics, and social media and streaming channels bloom with timeslips, this book outdoes them all. "Prepare to be transported," the blurb intones, "beyond the limits of the conventional and into the mysterious realms of time slips, missing time and alternate realities." Seems like a good complement to the essential timeslip classic *The Mask of Time* by Joan Forman, long overdue for reprint.

The editors gather 12 other contributors who mostly recount some highly strange real-life experiences of "weird time", often following up with theories and questions about what these cases imply about the deep nature of time itself. Before diving into these cases we get a brief walkthrough of historical portrayals of time, from ancient religions to modern science, emphasising the Eternalistic interpretation of the Block Universe theory where "the past, present and future all exist – are equally real". The editors outline scientific views, from the "usual suspects" like Gödel, Einstein and Feynman to outliers: Dr Ronald Mallett's time-travel research using lasers and Dr Michael P Masters who posits that "aliens" are our own descendents and causality problems (the Grandfather Paradox) are irrelevant. Is consciousness connected to a universal source of information outside the three-dimensional world, the Akashic Records of spiritual teachers? Can quantum entanglement alter time?

Classic cases like the Versailles incident of 1901 and the 1996 Bold Street, Liverpool, timeslip are thankfully outnumbered by more obscure ones, some related first-hand. Yet the spotty or absent referencing of many examples is a frustration, despite a slew of good fortean material.

Take the case of "Peter Williamson". Purportedly starting with a lightning strike at a family barbeque in Somerset in 1974, it involves four named personages: the experiencer, his wife "Mary", a "Doctor Nugent" and a nurse "Alice Charles". What elevates it to a super-extraordinary case, complete with a supposed police report, is Mr Williamson's retrieval from the timeslip dimension of a new pair of trousers made by "Herbert Cox, a West Country manufacturer" who – cue dramatic music – went out of business in 1954. A photograph captioned as Peter "in unfamiliar surroundings" merely shows a staged scene of a man on a nighttime street. This entirely unreferenced story perhaps originates in Jenny Randles' *Time Storms* (2001). A document on scribd.com adds "Colin Parsons", who investigated the Williamsons. One thing I've been able to verify is the existence, from 1914, of a Herbert Cox tailor in Sutton (not the West Country), with no mention of this business ending in 1954. This research took me under an hour, not apparently done by the *Weird Time* editors, so any information to verify its purported facts or at least the existence of the participants is welcome. The strong dubiousness of this case is outweighed by many other more credible stories, at least involving genuine participants. Beyond that, it's all down to the participant's veracity (hence the importance of finding those trousers, not that I'm counting on it).



Interviews include time-travellers John Titor and Tibus, who "operates much as an abducting alien". Omega, an interdimensional being from Venus, tells us the US Government works with four kinds of aliens. Spanish chrononauts post images of a desolate future urban Spain on TikTok. Might there be a code written by our future selves allowing only eccentrics and performance artists to time travel, their best disguise?

Amongst the time machines are Father Ernetti's "chronovisor"; Iranian scientist Ali Razeghi's time machine; the lentil-shaped time-warping machines of Vadim Chernobrov; the Bajak Flux Capacitor; and Nikola Tesla's time-warping incident. Do cryptids come from wrinkles in time? Can sudden experiences of high weirdness and synchronicity be comprehended by viewing time as a succession of parallel realities? Will celebrity physicists Neil deGrasse Tyson and Brian Cox ever dare to address just a few of these truly fascinating questions? Or can that only happen in another universe? This is the weirdness only the boldest scholars will venture into. And we need more of them!

Zontar Press books reveal the extraordinary: human impostors, alien artefacts, telepathic "secrets". Their latest is a mixed bag, yet never trite or dull, teeming with bold notions about reality, ideas so amazing they probably are true. If you can stand the waving-through of unreferenced sensationalism, much of *Weird Time* is wonderful, inspiring avenues for further reading and research amongst the odd sigh and raising of an eyebrow.

★★★★

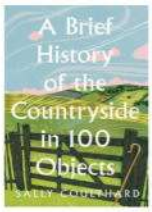
A Brief History of the Countryside in 100 Objects

Sally Coulthard

HarperNorth 2024

Hb, 322pp, £22, ISBN 9780008559427

Since Neil MacGregor's *A History of the World in 100 Objects* appeared in 2010, the idea of telling stories through collections of items has taken off. Sally Coulthard's book follows the MacGregor structure with a collection of brief essays accompanied by illustrations of the object being discussed. Focusing on rural life makes the format even more useful since, as she says, the affairs of ordinary rural people, as opposed to landowners, are often absent from the historical record.



From these short essays she creates a larger story that depicts the ways in which rural society changed and stayed the same over millennia. But this book is equally, if not more, enjoyable when experienced as a series of vignettes. Five minutes to spare? Why not find out why someone would keep a sheep's heart with nails stuck into it (to protect livestock from hostile magic), why every household in the nation once owned a potato rake (you try taking a potato out of a hearth without one), or how the village of Shitterton in Dorset got its name (it is, sadly, exactly what you think). The eclectic collection of objects highlights unexpected connections, such as the fact that Doctor Merryweather's famous Tempest Prognosticator, a device that attempted to predict the weather by means of leech behaviour, was inspired by a poem penned by Edward Jenner, inventor of vaccination.

Coulthard's book isn't a comprehensive history of rural Britain, but it isn't meant to be. It's a grab bag of objects and stories that illuminate ways of life that contemporary chroniclers often overlooked. Written in an engaging, gently humorous style, it provides a mixture of big-picture history and curious detail that will appeal even to readers who don't normally get excited about the social history of the countryside.

James Holloway

★★★★

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

DAVID V BARRETT **ROUNDS UP THE LATEST TITLES FROM THE WORLD OF SPECULATIVE AND FANTASTIC FICTION**

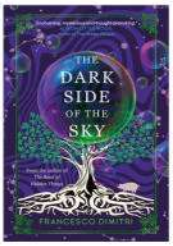
The Dark Side of the Sky

Francesco Dimitri

Titan 2024

Pb, 362pp, £9.99, ISBN 9781803362786

The Dark Side of the Sky is Francesco Dimitri's third novel written in English, and just as powerful as his first two. Ric and Rebecca lead a small community on the farm where they grew up in Puglia, the heel of Italy; it's philosophical, a bit Pagan, and magical in a very real way. Over the years, more people join it; the three main viewpoint characters are members, two of them new, so we discover it through their eyes as they do. In the first half of the book I came to know these three and the others living in the community, and the relationships between them, and the world-changing magic they share, so that when the inevitable happened and they were betrayed and "outed" online as a dangerous sex cult, I was shocked, outraged and genuinely hurt. I've spent enough years studying new religious movements (sociologists' term for sects and cults) to know that a) most of them are, in Douglas Adams's immortal phrase, mostly harmless, and b) once the Us-Them rhetoric gets ramped up by the censorious outside world, nothing good will come of it. This is the darkest of Dimitri's brilliant magical-realist novels, and for me by far the most painful. And that must be the hallmark of a master writer.



The Mountain in the Sea

Ray Nayler

Weidenfeld & Nicolson 2024

Pb, 456pp, £9.99, ISBN 9781399600484

What is consciousness? Philosophers, psychologists, neuroscientists, AI specialists: all will have different answers and all (if they're honest) will end up saying that they really don't know. The main thread of *The Mountain in the Sea* follows a marine biologist, Dr Ha Nguyen, studying the octopuses that live off the Con Dao archipelago in Vietnam; her companions at her research centre, an abandoned hotel complex, are a female bodyguard and Evrim, the only fully conscious android ever created – or is he just very well-programmed? Ha discovers that one octopus appears to be using symbols to communicate with others – and perhaps with her? Nayler led environmental conservation projects at Con Dao; his deep knowledge and his commitment to biodiversity shine through this fascinating novel – and you will end up with a much greater knowledge and appreciation of octopuses, as well as of consciousness!

Erosion

Lucya Starza

Moon Books 2024

Pb, 155pp, £10.99, ISBN 9781803414928

Fresh out of university in the 1980s, Alison shares a house with a group of young people in a small seaside town in Kent. Visiting a local witchy-type woman on the cliffs (she grows herbs for cooking and smoking and makes her own furniture out of driftwood) they discover a skull poking out of the eroding cliff. After retrieving it they use a homemade Ouija board to communicate with the skull, who gives her name as Rosmorta. *Erosion* by Lucya Starza is a bit slow-starting – too much description and explanation – but once the story gets going and they start asking Rosmorta to do things for them, and then everything goes terrifyingly wrong on the night of the Great Storm, it holds your attention.

Coup de Grâce

Sofia Ajram

Titan Books 2024

Hb, 136pp, £10.99, ISBN 9781803369624

Just to cheer you up, we have two novellas on depression. In Sofia Ajram's *Coup de Grâce*, Vicken plans to end his life in the river in Montreal, and is travelling on the subway to get there. But when he leaves the train he finds himself trapped in a station without an exit, but with endless corridors and cavernous spaces: a nightmarish scenario. The blurb compares it to Susanna Clarke's Piranesi, but it isn't at all like it; that was a work of wonder; this is a dark, claustrophobic, psychological horror story that doesn't really get anywhere. The initial concept is OK, but there are only so many ways you can describe someone stuck in endless corridors, and the ending is ambiguous and unsatisfying.

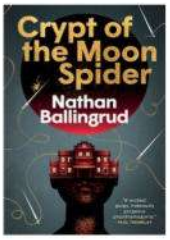
Crypt of the Moon Spider

Nathan Ballingrud

Titan Books 2024

Hb, 99pp, £10.99, ISBN 9781803368801

Far more interesting – and fun, despite being very dark – is Nathan Ballingrud's *Crypt of the Moon Spider*. It's 1923, and Veronica, who suffers from melancholy, is delivered by her uncaring husband to a sanitarium on the Moon for treatment. There, a pioneering doctor physically cuts out the bad memories from her brain and puts threads from a Moon Spider's web, which have a psychic quality, inside her open skull to cure her by building new memories. The massive Moon Spider might be extinct, but its worshippers, the Alabaster Scholars, assist the doctor with his surgery – with horrifying results. This is old-fashioned scientific romance of the best (and most outrageous!) kind, and you have to admire the author's sheer cheek.



The Grand Illusion

Syd Moore

Magpie Books 2024

Hb, 362pp, £16.99, ISBN 9780861541607

Many FT readers will know about the Cone of Power, a supposed magical working in WWII, usually ascribed to Gerald Gardner and the New Forest Coven, to stop Hitler invading Britain. The Grand Illusion by Syd Moore does involve occult practitioners, but the "magical" effect is actually an illusion created by a stage magician and his young female assistant, the viewpoint character. It's an interesting variant, but the writing style would be better suited to romantic fiction – and Moore's editor should have spotted that the "traditional" pub meal, the Ploughman's Lunch, mentioned twice, only dates to the 1950s.

Reading Love & Rockets

Marc Sobel

Fantagraphics 2024

Pb, 344pp, £49.99, ISBN 9781683968870

Anyone who has followed the comic book series *Love & Rockets* since its beginnings in 1981, or who has discovered it since, will sometimes be bewildered by the many different story streams by the two main writer/artists, Jaime and Gilbert Hernandez. Jaime's early stories mainly focus on Maggie and her sometime lover Hopey, a couple of Latino teenage punks in a fictional suburb of Los Angeles; Gilbert's early stories are set in a fictional Central American village, Palomar, but later branch out to follow certain characters in the US. With both, the characters age in real time, so Maggie, for example, is now middle-aged. Both writers, while being utterly down-to-earth in their characterisation and storytelling, occasionally bring in SF or fantasy elements. *Reading Love & Rockets*, by long-time fan Marc Sobel, aims to help us through the confusion. Heavily illustrated from the comics, it relates every story in the first 50 issues, with explanatory background when needed.

Love & Rockets: The Beginnings

Jaime Hernandez & Gilbert Hernandez

Fantagraphics 2024

Pb, 408pp, £75, ISBN 9781683968795

Love & Rockets: the Beginnings is a huge (13"x10") grab-bag of early work by the brothers, including punk band gig posters, early comic stories and early versions of some of their later much-loved characters. There's no text (apart from within the stories themselves); a brief introduction might have been helpful. This is one for fans, but it's fascinating seeing the early work of Los Bros Hernandez and their development as artists.

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Outcasts in from the cold

Another hugely welcome release in the British Film Institute's Flipside series sees a long-lost and impossible to find slice of Irish folk horror from the writer of *Blood on Satan's Claw*

The Outcasts

Dir Robert Wynne-Simmons, Ireland 1982
BFI, Blu-ray, £16.99

Released for one week in 1982 in a cinema in Dublin, with a VHS release in 1983 and a broadcast by Channel 4 in 1984, *The Outcasts* was, until now, virtually impossible to find. This restoration by the Irish Film Institute should help bring this long-lost film, written and directed by Robin Wynne-Simmons, who wrote the script for folk horror classic *Blood on Satan's Claw*, to the wider audience it deserves.

The story is set in pre-Famine Ireland in the early 19th century, where elements of the Celtic Christian Church remain. The local priest (Paul Bennett) is no puritan and presides with equanimity over a shotgun (or rather shillelagh) wedding. The union is brokered by the Matchmaker, Keenan (Cyril Cusack), one of the archetypal characters who stride through this narrative. Keenan, like many in this story, is unsure of his identity; we see him examining his face in a small mirror as he rides into the valley. Maura (Mary Ryan), the sister of the bride to be, is simple-minded, or away with the fairies as folk say. She is bullied by other teens, even her own family, who tell her scary stories. As Keenan rides home he sees a vision of Scarf Michael (Mick Lally), a liminal character; a musician, he's no fiddler of Dooney, but a far darker being. At the wedding feast, strange fiddle music is heard outside the house. When the young people go into the woods later, Maura is again bullied and separated from them and meets Scarf Michael. He performs folk magic, which frightens Maura's tormentors. He says he is a conjurer, but appears to be more of a Shaman who is dealing with real powers rather than performing tricks. Maura sleeps in a graveyard with Scarf Michael, but this might also be a liminal space. After she gets home, it becomes known that she was with Scarf Michael; those with grudges accuse her of witchcraft and she is blamed for every misfortune that occurs in the area. Though the priest defends her, she is under threat and must summon Scarf Michael to protect and nurture her.

Scarf Michael is no fiddler of Dooney, but a far darker character

This is a dark, magical tale entwining Irish myth and history and the poetry of WB Yeats. There are magical journeys through a brutal landscape and quests for answers that cannot be found in this world, and maybe not in the in-between zones either. The BFI's Blu-ray contains various extras and a commentary by Dr Diane A Rodgers.

Páiric Ó Corráin

★★★★☆

Dogman Territory: Werewolves in the Land Between the Lakes

Dir Seth Breedlove, US 2024
Available on digital platforms

A tepid entry in Seth Breedlove's ongoing Small Town Monsters cryptid documentary series, *Dogman Territory: Werewolves in the Land Between the Lakes* addresses the alleged 1982 murder of a family of four while camping at the Land Between the Lakes National Recreation Area, a bucolic campsite that rests between Kentucky Lake and Lake Barkeley, near the Tennessee-Kentucky border. The family in question was ripped apart with such ferocity that it led some locals to believe that only a supernatural creature could be responsible for such a monstrous attack. These deaths, however, may simply be a local legend, as the murders were left unreported by the media, though some suspect that the lack of media attention was in fact the result of a conspiratorial effort to bury the story out of fear that it would negatively impact the all-important tourist trade of the economically depressed region.

Following a nifty, early 1980s-style fake advertisement for the recreation area, the film, co-hosted by frequent Breedlove collaborators Aaron Deese and Shannon Legro, becomes a formulaic, unexceptionally filmed and edited, everything and the kitchen sink-type documentary, as residents recount encounters with werewolf-like creatures and other supernatural phenomena, while local historians and researchers weave fantastical, often unfounded speculations.

Scant evidence of additional deaths in the region is provided, as is a frankly unconvincing audio recording with a man who claims to have been a family friend of the four family members and who survived the alleged attack. What's more, a pair of local researchers claim to have discovered tunnels in the recreation area filled with human bones; yet after recording this evidence, the bones mysteriously disappeared. Unsurprisingly, neither the recordings nor the tunnels are shown. Because the filmmakers can provide no strong evidence for any of these unsupportable claims, the viewer is left with little more than hearsay, local legend, and a string of conspiracy theories. What hard "evidence" is provided, audio and thermal imaging of the alleged dogmen, is most certainly of natural origin.

Somewhat refreshingly, the documentary also introduces less supernatural issues that have impacted the region, like the Tennessee Valley Authority's actions against local residents who opposed the environmentally destructive construction of hydroelectric dams. It's never a good sign when what is ostensibly a narrative red herring provides welcome respite from a series of repetitive accounts of alleged cryptids with only wild speculations to back them up. A true disappointment.

Eric Hoffman

★☆☆☆☆

TELEVISION

FT's resident couch potatoes STU NEVILLE & RUTH MORRIS cast an eye over the small screen's current fortean offerings

In the crowded world of cryptozoology, the star attraction remains Bigfoot. Broadly, there are two schools of thought regarding the big hairy ones: first, that Sasquatches are living, breathing creatures that are a natural part of the ecosystem; second, that Sasquatch is a paranormal being, a spiritual entity long-enshrined in indigenous folklore. (There is a third if you count the "there's no such thing" camp, but as they think bears can talk to one another and throw stones we tend to ignore them.) As a result, programmes made about them tend to favour one school over another, or spend so much time attempting to reconcile the two that the water just gets muddier. It seems to have occurred to nobody to make two documentaries, side by side, in the same style, each focusing on one of the two main theories – until now. *A Flash of Beauty* (Prime) is a diptych of films which fully invests in each stream, one at a time, to quite remarkable effect.

Bigfoot Revealed, the first part, takes the natural angle. It starts with an old TV showing well-known and mostly well-loved faces from this branch of cryptozoology, notably the late Peter Byrne. Following this is a fairly comprehensive contextualising section, outlining historical reports from early settlers and trappers and, crucially, the folklore of the First Nation tribes: this respect toward indigenous traditions is often lacking or given cursory mention in other films. This is a refreshing change from those TV shows that slam straight into jarring music, hysterical commentary and over-excited people in camo-gear.

> *He prefers to accept that they simply have these mystical abilities*

Bringing things up to date are multiple first-hand testimonies from witnesses, all of whom are given enough time to expand and contextualise – again a refreshing change from the usual attempt to cram in reports at volume with only cursory scrutiny. These stories vary in tone, from compelling multiple witness encounters to more questionable reports such as the disconcerting but-somewhat-credibility-stretching story of a hunter experiencing what can only be described as Sasquatch-phrenology through the skin of his tent. Most, however, are unsensational accounts from sensible people, the sort who know at what they are looking (and can tell a Bigfoot from a bear). There are particularly persuasive stories from sincere but awkward witnesses like Daryl and Tobe; not polished performers, but people with a story to tell that's at once fascinating and heart-warming.

Then there is a good, broad examination of some of the better non-anecdotal evidence: handprints, casts, and an extended look at Patty and Ron Morehead's recordings in which two Bigfeet, seemingly one of each sex, have a night-time domestic, possibly about who left muddy prints all over the cave or ate the last loganberries. All in all, a very good state-of-play summary of nuts-and-bolts Bigfoot research.

The second film, *Paranormal Bigfoot* has the same stunning photography as the first, but a different emphasis: this has a far more spiritual feel and takes a deep dive into what's often the most overlooked aspect of Sasquatch research, that of First Nation traditions. While a strong strand of research seems to tacitly follow the line that Bigfoot basically didn't exist until Jerry Crew's sighting in the 1950s, this goes back to look at what the people who have lived in the forest for millennia say. The scenes have titles, and the first – "The Blessing" – features a First Nation elder (and potential heavy metal act) called Ravenwolf who is careful to ask for forgiveness from the spirits for even discussing Bigfoot. He tells us that the beings exist between realms – i.e. are interdimensional – can hide (cloak) themselves and make low sounds that can instil fear. He eschews scientific explanations, preferring to simlpy accept that they have these mystical abilities.

Witnesses from *Bigfoot Revealed* reappear, but with different stories or new aspects of previous ones, a clever device that reinforces the often subtle thread connecting the two films. Two witnesses who saw a Sasquatch by a lake have such a deep sincerity that it's impossible not to believe they saw something. They got the strong impression that Bigfeet – whatever their reality – will only be seen when they *wish* to be seen; and that when they are seen, their essential natural grace and elegance is striking.

The possible science that could explain some of this is explored, with much emphasis on quantum theory. While this has been batted around for a while, it's rarely as well explained as by Dr Simeon Hein; while he doesn't come up with anything like a Bigfoot 'theory of everything', he provides what could be a compelling and vital piece of the puzzle.

Researcher Sonya makes the point that "If something comes into our belief system and leaves, then we don't have a mental construct for it." If people have been taught that what they're seeing doesn't exist, this sets up a huge cognitive dissonance, challenging their sense of reality. This, again, is reflected in the differing attitudes of later populations (feeling conflicted about their sighting, fearing ridicule) and the indigenous tribes (acceptance and respect, coupled with wariness of the motives of outsiders researching the subject). It's this impact on the witnesses that shines through many of the stories in each film – like that of Daryl, a man with limited time to live who, along with his son-in-law, sees a Bigfoot and undergoes an epiphany. It's a deeply moving story, which even the most jaded of us would be touched by – and this is the whole point, the unifying thread. A calm, meditative, balanced and ultimately exquisite piece in two parts, where the rationalism of one complements the spirituality of the other. As a commentator says: "The more we speak of the subject with grace and elegance, others too will begin to perceive the extraordinary. And perhaps they too will have a flash of beauty." And beautiful it is.

THE HAUNTED GENERATION

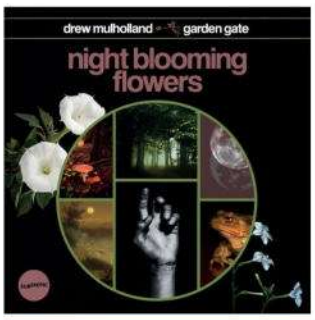
BOB FISCHER ROUNDS UP THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE PARALLEL WORLDS OF POPULAR HAUNTOLOGY

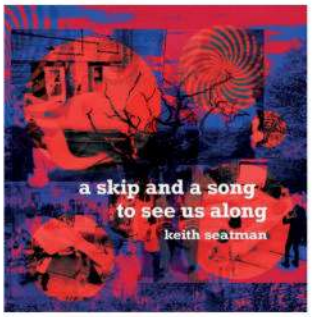
"A botanist working in a remote wood dismisses what she believes to be superstitions, but as night falls she is led off track by a will-o'-the-wisp," explains US musician Timmi Meskers. "She encounters a strange figure who offers to help find the flower she pursues, before leading her through a ring of mushrooms to a woodland banquet…"

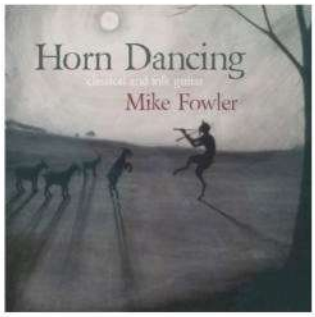
Timmi is describing the storyline of *Night Blooming Flowers*, a stunning new album recorded under her regular *nom-de-plume* of Garden Gate in collaboration with mischievous Glaswegian tape looper Drew Mulholland. Combining groovy vintage horror trappings with evocative electronica, the album is a melodic descent into the world of fairy folklore. "I was over the moon to get a message from Drew expressing his interest in a collaboration," says Timmi. "I've been a fan of his work since I was a student, and the album wouldn't exist without his incredible sonic contributions."

The inspiration for the botanist's plight, meanwhile, came from Emma Wilby's 2005 book *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits*. "The pieces on the record were sequenced to align with the witch trial records presented in the book," says Timmi. "It argues that there are parallels between British fairy lore and the shamanic experience: moving between ordinary and non-ordinary reality. During a time of hardship, the experiencer encounters a strange figure who arrives through a physically impossible natural feature – a crack in a stone or a hole in a tree – and takes them to another world. A world where they may be required to pledge allegiance to a kind of fairy king or queen." Interested in taking the pledge yourself? Slip between dimensions to gardengate.bandcamp.com.

Remaining (just) on this side of ordinary reality, genial Brummie dismantler Brian Duffy has spent the last two decades coaxing splendid noises from battered Speak & Spell machines as conductor of his







own Modified Toy Orchestra. But his excellent new solo album *Instead of Faint Spirit* sees him wrangling instead with a 1975 System 100 synthesizer. Fed, of course, through a broken CB Radio. Oh, and an ancient Telefunken reel-to-reel tape machine. It's a beautifully organic collection, and standout track 'Wind On Combe Gibbett' was inspired by a visit Brian once made to this macabre 17th century monument with his friend Trish Keenan – the late, great singer with Broadcast, to whom the album is dedicated. Head to buriedtreasure.bandcamp.com.

And if you're suitably inspired, I'd always recommend checking out Broadcast's extraordinary back catalogue, too – although co-founder James Cargill has now declared an end to the band with the poignant release of *Distant Call*. A collection of home demos recorded by James and Trish between 2000 and 2006, it's a touching and intimate full stop to a peerless body of work. Find a copy at broadcast.bandcamp.com.

Perhaps the spiritual successors to Broadcast's psychedelic crown are The Soundcarriers, whose fifth album *Through Other Reflections* is a charming homage to an era when discarded Mellotrons were frequently worshipped by fauns in sun-dappled woodland clearings. It's pitched perfectly in the headspace between Traffic and Syd Barrett, with frontwoman Leonore Wheatley a force of delightfully wayward nature. It can be found tangled amongst the undergrowth at the-soundcarriers.bandcamp.com. But if you're still hankering for "black-lit liturgies of bog bodies caked in mud and powered by queer enchantment", then look no further than the self-titled debut album of Leeds-based trio Tristwch Y Fenywod. This zither-powerered Welsh language exploration of myth and magic conjures up the spectres of Dead Can Dance and The Cocteau Twins, and is currently manifesting at night-school.bandcamp.com.

Other slices of strangeness wafting across my desk: *Other Voices* is the work of The Sheffield Paranormal Research Group, taking "audio emanations from the unknown" (apparently collected during the eldritch experiments of this shadowy South Yorkshire collective) and weaving them into soundscapes created by the equally mysterious Spongeboy. It's bleeding through the ether at spongeboy.bandcamp.com. And I'm equally taken with *Horn Dancing*, a collection of horror film soundtracks played sublimely on classical guitar by the nimble fingers of Mike Fowler. Adapting music from the likes of *Blood on Satan's Claw* and the big-screen 1973 version of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Mike has created a darkly beautiful album. Crack open the Butterkist popcorn at mikefowler.bandcamp.com.

Meanwhile, it's always a treat to receive a new missive from Keith Seatman, an impish fairy being long since resident in a non-ordinary reality of his own creation. Keith's terrific new album *A Skip and a Song To See Us Along* is Edwardian psychedelia riddled with memories of haunted fairgrounds and fragmented nursery rhymes, a world where Wurlitzer organs are played by skeletons in top hats and blank-faced dolls join spindly fingers around faded Ouija boards. "It's basically 10 tunes to confuse and befuddle," says Keith. "Get up, tap your fingers and click your toes… " Head to keithseatman.bandcamp.com and grab a copy before it vanishes back through a hole in a tree.

● Visit the Haunted Generation website at **www.hauntedgeneration.co.uk**, send details of new releases, or memories of the original "haunted" era to **hauntedgeneration@gmail.com**.

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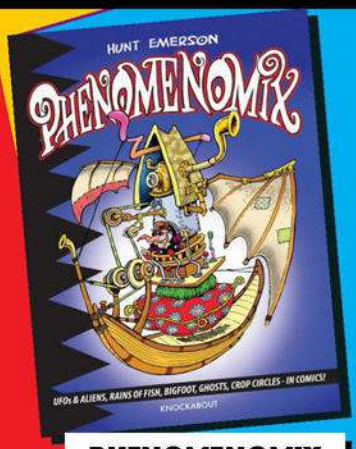

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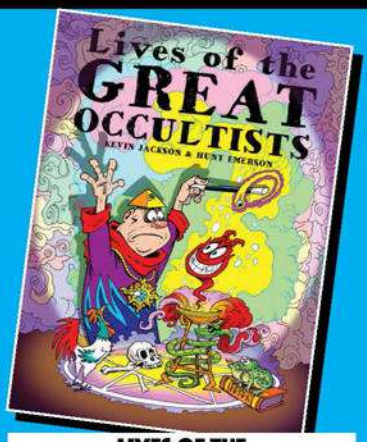

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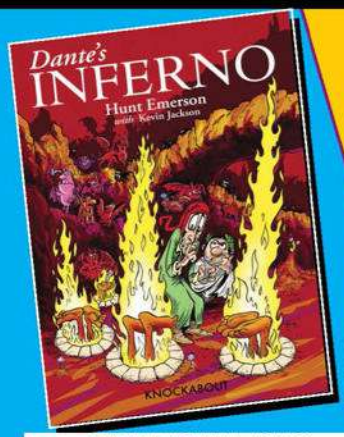

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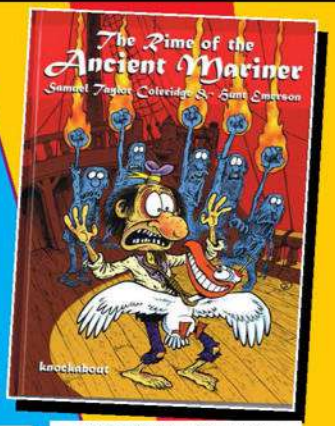

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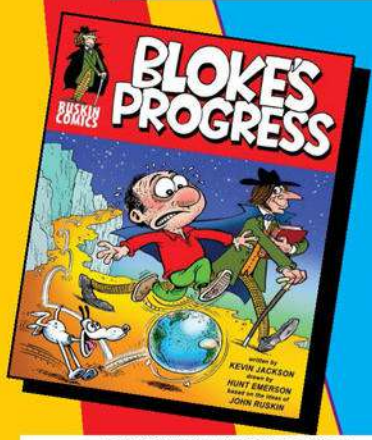

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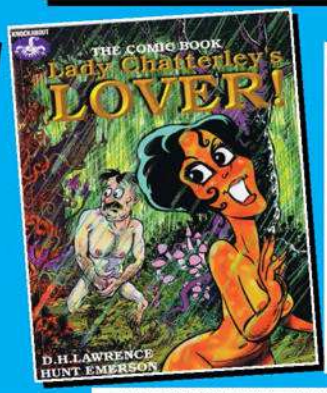
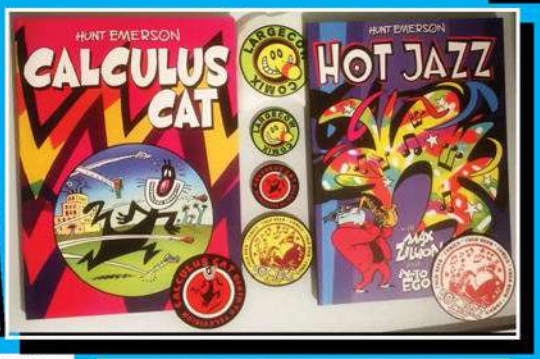


LADY CHATTERLEY'S LOVER!

My somewhat bowdlerized version of the novel by DH Lawrence. Bawdy, robust and bizarre - yes, it's Adults Only. ***£8.00***



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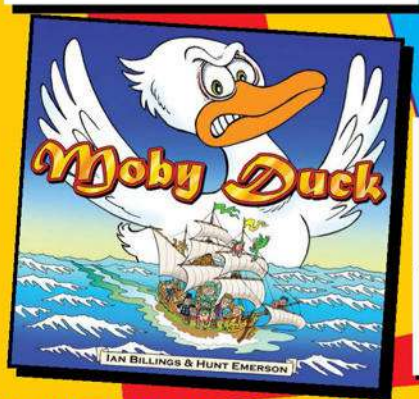

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Vanishing diners etc

The Vanishing Diner [**FT448:25**] is just one example of a category that is perhaps best described as vanishing scenery – which happens all over the world. Someone finds themselves in a place that either vanishes, like a sudden awakening from a dream, or they leave normally but cannot find the place again. Sometimes the experience may best be explained as a time slip, but (as the experience recounted shows) this is not always the case.

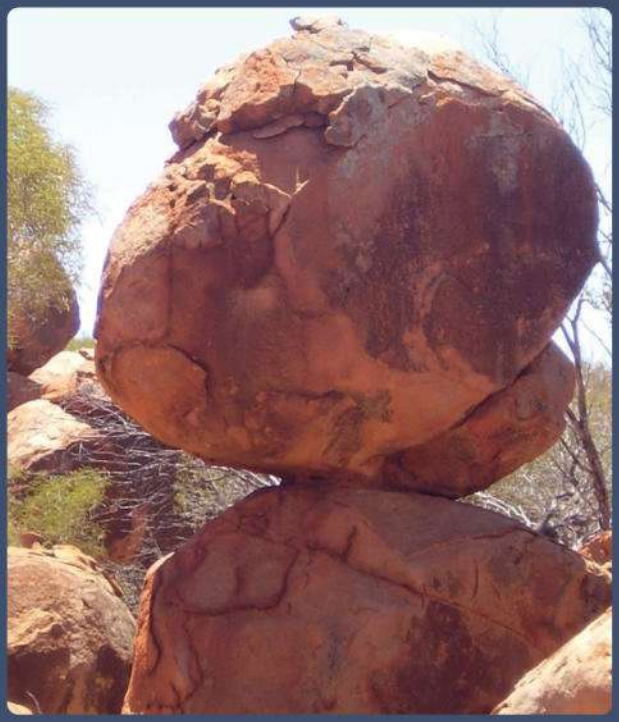
What puzzles me, if the Fay were involved in this incident, is that eating fairy food is allegedly dangerous, yet the people in the story had no problems. Perhaps they escaped because they paid for their meal. Or the Fay may have been in a good mood or may have decided it would be a neater trick to let the two return and be seen as fools.

- The implication of Fay involvement in the case of the vanishing diner dovetails neatly with the cryptoterrestrial hypothesis [**FT448:24**]. My personal view is that every one of the theories discussed in the paper could explain some of the anomalous phenomena associated with UAP, and much else. The possibility those notorious tricksters the Fay are involved explains much of the mischievous nature of such experiences. I am reminded of Zaphod Beeblebrox in the *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* describing how young aliens land in a remote place, dressed in comic book alien style and parade in front of some poor mug who will never be believed. Some people are harmed in these encounters, suggesting that the Fay/Aliens/whatever have a sense of humour like a teenager tormenting an animal; but they are capricious and do not always cause harm (The Zimbabwe goblins – **FT448:22** – also fit the trickster archetype).
- Finally, the strange meteor of 1924 [**FT448:21**] left me wondering if it really was an ultraterrestrial dragon. It also reminded me of John Keel's research indicating dragon legends are confined to certain regions of the globe and suggesting such creatures existed recently enough to appear in myths and legends. Given the longevity of oral tradition, dragons may have lasted till the last Ice Age.

Overall I get the whimsical impression that the world is out to play tricks on us humans.

Alex Kashko
Edinburgh, Scotland

SIMULACRA CORNER



Steven D'Alessio found this feature at Red Hill Kookyine near the town of Southern Cross in the Eastern Goldfields of Western Australia in May 2009. He thought it looked like a gorilla's head.

We are always glad to receive pictures of spontaneous forms and figures, or any curious images. Send them (with your postal address) to **Fortean Times, PO Box 1200, Whitstable CT1 9RH** or to **sieveking@forteantimes.com**

William Shatner

As a seven-year-old, I briefly met William Shatner when he was visiting my friend's mom – who was a local celebrity newscaster (he was charming to us gaggle of girls). Say what you will about Shatner's pretentious pontificating, it is perhaps that very tendency that made him such a stellar casting choice for some of the great bad movies he's appeared in, lending them a sort of goofy gravitas. His fortean film gems include *Incubus* (performed entirely in Esperanto), *The People* (a made-for-TV movie about an apparent Amish-like sect with a secret origin story) and the creme de la creepy, *Kingdom of the Spiders* (set in the "Peaceful Verde Valley").

Regarding Arizona's Verde Valley, while I've seen the occasional tarantula after summer monsoons in the Sonoran desert, I've paddled the Verde River a couple of times and never encountered an arachnid invasion – though I did see river otters frolicking in the moonlight, mountain lion tracks in the sand outside my tent, and a middle-aged naked hippy soaking in the Verde hot springs (situated in the burnt-out ruins of a turn-of-the-last-century resort). As to Shatner's proclamation that "Every living thing in the world is love" maybe that is his optimistic answer to the question posed in the *Kingdom of the Spiders* theme song "Will tomorrow bring the love we need to last forever more or could it bring the unknown that we've never seen before?".

Annie Henderson
Tucson, Arizona

Groot

Ian Jarvis is mistaken as far as his simulacra of Groot taking flowers to his girlfriend goes [**FT446:59**], since Groot's species is parthenogenic, so there would be no female Groot to greet! The 10th Doctor Who met a sentient tree at a party to celebrate the destruction of the Earth, mingling with the Mox of Balhoon, the Face of Boe, the Blue Man Group fan club and Billie Piper (who was there to see the culmination of her efforts). This sentient tree was content to consider having his breath blown in her face as a sufficiently romantic advance from the Doctor, although it's not clear if she appreciated his cultural sensitivity or was simply voracious for any kind of attention, which doesn't just happen with sentient trees. Sadly, she couldn't keep up with the Doctor's antics, and he ended up settling for a dehydrated trampoline possessed by the tortured soul of Zoe Wannamaker. Clearly, though, Groot would've been totally outmatched and a tragic wallflower at that party.

James Wright
Westcliff-on-Sea, Essex

Star-studded

Karl Shuker ['Raiders of the Lost Monster Flicks', **FT446:30-37**] really needs to get out to the cinema more often. In his write-up of *Ssssss* (which I was old enough

LETTERS

to see at the cinema in 1973 – actually, I wasn't but I sneaked in underage anyway) he made the comment that Dirk Benedict was "the only famous name in this movie". For shame!

Strother Martin was one of Hollywood's greatest character actors in Westerns, appearing in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, *True Grit*, *The Deadly Companions*, *Nevada Smith*, *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *The Sons of Katie Elder*, *The Wild Bunch* and many, many more, not to mention *Cool Hand Luke* (he even gets the classic line "What we have here is a failure to communicate"), *The Streetfighter*, *Slap Shot* and the bonkers killer bat movie *Nightwing*.

Heather Menzies was Louisa Von Trapp in *The Sound of Music* and was also in another classic cryptozoic creature feature, Joe Dante's wonderful *Piranha*.

Richard B Shull was another terrific character actor in *Klute*, *The Anderson Tapes*, the mermaid comedy *Splash* and the killer canine movie *The Pack*.

Tim O'Connor was one of the mainstays of the TV series *Peyton Place* and *Buck Rogers in the 25th Century*.

It's also worth mentioning that the film's producer, Dan Striepeke, was more famous as a make-up artist, working on all of the original *Planet of the Apes* movies (and the spin-off TV show) and getting Oscar nominations for *Forrest Gump* and *Saving Private Ryan*.

Not a bad pedigree for a low budget monster movie.

Dave Taylor
Stamford, Lincolnshire

Camden fish puzzle

In Alan Bennett's *Untold Stories* I came across the following (on page 189):

19 May. Come out this morning (still grey, still cold) to find smack in front of my door a fish – a wet fish actually, about 9 inches [23cm] *long, still glistening as if just caught. Pinkish in parts (a mullet?) dropped by a seagull perhaps or hurled into the garden by a dissatisfied customer? Except that the wet fish shop in Camden High Street* [north London] *has long been ousted by yet another emporium selling leather jackets. Anyway, a fish. I leave it for a while to see if it catches a gull's eye, then put it in the bin.*

Obviously Camden Lock is the nearest body of water but are there mullets in Camden Lock? A fish of nine inches seems large for a gull, so perhaps a heron? Who knows?

Gary Tavender
Howden, East Yorkshire

LOST
I'VE LOST MY SKELETON
LOST
LOST SKELETON - I CAN'T QUITE REMEMBER WHERE I LEFT IT BUT IT WAS SOMEWHERE AROUND HERE AND I'LL BE NEEDING IT BACK AS IT'S HARD TO BE WITH-OUT YOUR SKELETON I FEEL PROPER DAFT FOR LOSING IT
IF YOU FIND MY LOST SKELETON PLEASE CALL ME OVN - 07467834707
TA BARRY

Cumbrian mystery

A rather strange poster was observed doing the rounds on notice boards around Pooley Bridge and Ullswater in Cumbria in July 2023. Meanwhile, a skeleton was photographed above a shop in Keswick, also in Cumbria. All attempts to inform the person whose mobile phone number appeared on the poster that a possible sighting of their skeleton had occurred were ignored. Very strange indeed.

Myghal Map Serpren
Redruth, Cornwall

Two Fortean Oddities

These strange tales both appear in *Phenomena: A Book of Wonders* (Thames & Hudson, 1977, pp.51 & 105) by John Michell and Robert JM Rickard. I wonder if any FT reader had ever heard anything else about these reports as I can find no reference to either of them anywhere. Admittedly, they sound like fake news.

1: Creepy Coriander

Credited as having originally appeared in the *Daily Mirror* on 14 January 1975. I know that newspapers (the 'red-tops' particularly) are notorious for printing fake or inaccurate reports, but since it is a letter from a reader, including a partial address, I think it is more likely to be true.

Entitled 'BOTTOMLESS', the letter comes from Mrs J Tidmarsh, Hunton Bridge, Kings Langley, Hertfordshire, who writes:

"I wonder if you or your readers can solve a creepy problem. My husband is fond of curries and makes them quite regularly. About five years ago he bought a tin of coriander and each time he makes a curry he puts one heaped teaspoon of coriander in it. Yet the next time he gets the tin out, it is packed tight under the lid. In other words, although he has been using the coriander for five years, the tin is still full! We can't understand it."

2: The Phantom Lake

An article in the *Daily Mirror* (dated 10 Nov 1969) recounted how John and Christine Swain, from Ilminster in Somerset, had made around 250 journeys for the last 17 years to the New Forest in Hampshire, attempting to find a lake they had seen way back in 1952.

The couple and their sons, Ted and Chris (aged 10 and 12 at the time) saw a lake with a boulder in the centre of it, with an Excalibur-type sword embedded in it.

All four members of the family claim they saw it on a trip to Beaulieu Abbey. Mrs Swain recounts: "We were driving down some little, off-beat lanes on a picnic trip when we saw the lake. Then we saw a boulder and the sword about fifty yards from the shore. We thought it was some sort of memorial to King Arthur. We were all fascinated by the scene."

The article states how roughly once every three weeks for the past 17 years, the Swain family have driven to the New Forest searching for the lake – without success.

Mr Swain was quoted as saying: "I'm certain that what I saw was real. We've done everything possible to find the lake. We've made hundreds of enquiries, and read countless books… We're beginning to wonder if we aren't crazy."

The article concludes with the sentence:

"One thing the Swains are sure of – their search goes on until they clear up the mystery."

Andy Owens
Halifax, West Yorkshire

Status of psi research

David Hambling's response to my second 'Middle Aged Mulder' article in [**FT447:50-51, 448:14**] painted an excessively negative picture of parapsychology's last half century. The Geller phenomenon formed only a small part of the last 150 years of research, and parapsychology cannot be judged upon it. As for the claim that parapsychology must rely upon psychic "stars" or one "confirmed psychic" for validation; this is not a demand that is placed upon experimental psychology, where effects are typically assessed statistically. This is why experimental parapsychology uses comparable methods.

Hambling's dismissal of Project Star Gate as a "conspicuous fail" was also very partial. Pressure from Congress and budget cuts ended the programme in the CIA. The American Institutes for Research (AIR) review which concluded that Star Gate had not "produced useful information" was significantly incomplete (although AIR did conclude that Remote Viewing was anomalous).[1]

The AIR review operated under data restrictions. Ed May, the programme director of Star Gate, has stated that this data restriction precluded positive findings. He claimed that the CIA failed to contact people who possessed critical programme knowledge, including some end-users of the intelligence data.[2] Contrary to what Hambling claims, Star Gate "attracted backers" for 20 years, specifically 19 intelligence agencies, 17 of whom returned with additional missions for the programme.[3]

Much is made of the recent growth of anomalistic psychology (the psychology of "why people believe in psi") at the expense of parapsychology. But the growth of anomalistic psychology is not necessarily to parapsychology's detriment. Around 2000, Koestler Chair Professor Robert Morris stressed the importance of strengthening links between parapsychology and the mainstream.[4] He believed that researchers in parapsychology should also contribute to anomalistic psychology. This has become normal practice.[5]

Morris's strategy arose in part because of the strong academic taboo against parapsychology. This taboo is not negligible: in 2015, researcher Etzel Cardeña reported cases of active censorship and suppression, and the ostracising of scientists interested in psi research.[6] Simply, studying the "psychology of the psychic" is a safer option than pursuing evidence for psi. Despite this, substantial psi research continues. Dean Radin searched on pubmed.gov and found 467 articles on "parapsychology" since 2000 (D Radin, personal communication, 12 Aug 2024).

Hambling attempts to minimise the significance of psi statistical effects by calling them "barely detectable", relegating parapsychology to "a footnote". This is what my colleague Bethany Butzer has called "a straw man argument" that she thinks "detracts from the fact that psi effects have been documented in peer-reviewed studies – with effect sizes that are of the same magnitude as those found within other areas of psychology". (B Butzer, personal communication, 12 Aug 2024). In his book *The Conscious Universe* researcher Dean Radin points out that "…*any* form of genuine psi, even statistically 'better than chance' psi, carries revolutionary potential for our understanding of the natural world".[7] Finally, Hambling provides no substantial argument for why large-scale, conspicuous psi is now ruled out; the database of projects like Star Gate contain case-studies that might even contradict this claim.

Matt Colborn
Haconby, Lincolnshire

NOTES

1 *SB Marwaha (2020) 'Stargate (Part 1): The US Government Sponsored Psi Research Programme,' Paranormal Review 94, pp. 4—13.*

2 *EC May (1996). 'The American Institutes for Research Review of the Department of Defense's STAR GATE Program: A Commentary', Journal of Scientific Exploration 10(1), pp 89—107.*

3 *SB Marwaha (2020). 'Stargate (Part 2): the Utility of Informational Psi the Stargate Operational Remote Viewing Programme', Paranormal Review 95, pp. 4—13.*

4 RL Morris (2000). 'Parapsychology in the 21st century', *Journal of Parapsychology 64*(2):123-137

5 E Cardeña, SJ Lynn. & S Krippner (2014). *Varieties of anomalous experience: Examining the scientific evidence,* American Psychological Association.

6 E Cardeña (2015). 'The Unbearable Fear of Psi: On Scientific Suppression in the 21st Century', *Journal of Scientific Exploration 29*(4), pp. 601—620.

7 D Radin (1997*). 'The conscious universe: the scientific truth of psychic phenomena'*, Harper San Francisco, p.213, his italics.

David Hambling, in his article 'Middle-aged Mulder: time to move on' [**FT448:14**] suggests that "paranormal research is now just a footnote". To reach this conclusion he compared papers mentioning 'Paranormal Research' recorded on Google Scholar for 1985-86 to 2015-16. As a result, he opines "Science moved from exploring the paranormal to exploring why people believe in it, often in relation to mental health."

I would suggest that one of the reasons he concluded this is that the term 'paranormal' is very rarely used anymore by scientists exploring information transfer across/through non-physical fields.

For example, Edward F Kelly at the University of Virginia, who is very active in this area, entitles the book he has co-edited with Paul Marshall *Consciousness Unbound* (2021). The book contains the results of empirical research done by various scientists in the area, for example, on the phenomenon of precognition, and the term 'paranormal' is hardly mentioned throughout this hefty volume. In its place are a number of other terms, such as 'psi', 'transpersonal' and, my favourite, 'psychophysical phenomena that defy explanation in terms of the operation of the unaided brain'.

One should perhaps also note that, in the same issue of FT, there is an interview with Rupert Sheldrake ('Fort Talk', pages 46-50), where Sheldrake does not mention the word 'paranormal' in relation to his own work at all, though that work is an investigation into something that Hambling would probably, unfashionably, classify as such.

Helen Davis
Hitchin, North Hertfordshire

Pyramid Power

Mark Spurlock [**FT448:68**] was prompted by my piece on pyramids to ask if anyone remembered the Styrofoam pyramids claimed to keep razor blades sharp even after prolonged use, and whether they worked.

The device was patented by Czech inventor Karel Drbalin in 1949 and became popular in the 1970s. Intrigued, I carried out a school project to test one and found that the biggest challenge was that there is no good way to measure sharpness. How sharp a blade feels when shaving is a general impression and might be swayed by suggestion, so people may have believed that their razors stayed sharper longer, just as they believe putting a spoon a champagne bottle will preserve fizz, when it has no actual effect.

As far as any objective test went, such as how much force a given blade needed to cut paper, the pyramid had no effect. Similarly, microscopic examination did not show any sharpening. Decades later the TV show *Mythbusters* tested pyramids for sharpening razors and for preserving food (Series 3 Episode 14) and came to exactly the same conclusion.

The story about pyramids sharpening razors may be because pyramids are supposed to preserve things. Organic material in a pyramid tends to keep well because it is stored in a cool environment with very low humidity. A knife left in a pyramid for thousands of years would stay sharp because knives only get dull with use.

Myths are tenacious things though, so don't be surprised if pyramid razor-sharpeners reappear at some point.

David Hambling
London

Regarding Mark Spurlock's letter about pyramid power, I never saw the advertised polystyrene pyramids, but I distinctly recall a box out in one of the popular books on mysteries in the kid's section of my local library in the early Eighties, describing a cardboard pyramid you could build, Blue Peter style, to test the various theories on pyramid power. It mentioned the razor sharpening, but the experiment recommended entombing a piece of cheese instead, to see if it remained fresh.

With the fickleness of childhood I neglected to ever do this, but did anyone ever try it? I just imagine parents finding whiffy little cheese Pharaohs after a week and being non-plussed. It was important to place the pyramid carefully along a particular axis compass-wise too. Did any cheeses outsit the ages, fresh even today in a neglected bedroom corner?

Dean Teasdale
Gateshead, Tyne & Wear

"Could you not have mentioned your battery was on 2% before we landed?"

MARTIN ROSS

It Happened to Me...

Readers write in with their own accounts of strange phenomena

Cloak of foreboding

My relationship with the girl I met while I was at Aberdeen University from 1992 to 1995 ended and she moved to Norway, but we stayed in touch and would meet up when neither of us were seeing anyone else. Several years ago she got breast cancer, so we began communicating on skype on a Friday evening, at first sporadically but then weekly and for hours at a time. We were very close. This lasted for a year until the Christmas holiday. We had made tentative plans for her to come over to Scotland to stay in January so we could catch up and she could see her friends. We agreed to chat after Christmas and I went to stay back at the family home for the holiday.

Around Boxing Day, I felt what can only be described as a heavy black cloak settle down on my shoulders. This carried on for few days until I had gone to bed on Hogmanay. During the night I woke to hear myself shouting loudly and turned round to see the black "cloak", now a dark mist, leaving me and the house. I returned home a few days later to find a message from her friend to say that she had been taken to hospital after Christmas and had passed away on Hogmanay. I am convinced that this was part of her soul finding me but that it was a dark presence because she did not want to die.

Jon — (full name on file)
Clacks, Scotland

Black-eyed critter

I grew up in rural Northumberland near the town of Morpeth. As children, my friends and I used to explore the surrounding area of our village, mostly fields and small wooded areas, one of which we frequented often. We went there at night and over the years heard many spooky noises, most likely animals.

After graduating from university around 2017, I returned from Liverpool to live with my parents once again. Due to mental health reasons, I had a hard time living

"When its head moved, I could see nothing but blackened pits for eyes..."

alone. I would spend a lot of time in nature, going for walks in our old haunts and generally sitting and listening to the natural world. On one of my jaunts in the wilderness, I sat down in the crook of the base of a tree that overlooked a watery/grassy area of clearing, hoping to spot some deer. The clearing must have been about 200m (660ft) away. The tree was unusually comfortable and instead of seeing deer I rather quickly fell asleep.

I suddenly started out of my sleep, and felt as if an overwhelming terror had overcome me and was pulling me to look at the clearing. As I sat there, breathing heavily, I saw movement. A creature, similar to a large wolf, stood within the clearing; it appeared to be covered in the moss and debris of the forest. Its bones seemed to be semi-visible through the matted fur and rot of the creature's body. It turned its head, as if surveying the landscape, and when its head moved, I could see nothing but blackened pits for eyes – though at that distance it was hard to tell if it had no eyes, or fully black eyes. After that it simply lumbered away, over a nearby raised area of wood and disappeared from my line of sight. I could do nothing but sit, stunned at the encounter.

As the creature left, my feeling of fear faded. I quickly made it home and resolved to tell no one of my encounter. Whether it was some sort of werewolf, forest spirit, or sleep-induced hallucination I will never know; but it has been my sole encounter with inexplicable high strangeness, despite my returning to those woods many times since.

Patrick Bell
Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne & Wear

Water appearing

After reading Kevin Whelan's account of his disappearing snack packets [**FT446:62**], I would like to relate a series of incidents that happened to my wife and I. They happened back in the Seventies when we were a young couple and living in the first house that we were able to get a mortgage on and buy. It was a large late Victorian terrace house.

At the time our marriage was going through a stressful time and I have often wondered if the intense energy that was swirling around us at the time in some way triggered the events. The first incident occurred when we were going to bed one evening. It was winter and I went upstairs to fetch our hot water bottle out of the bed (no central heating in those days). I threw back the duvet only to see a puddle of water roughly six inches [15cm] in diameter soaking into the mattress. It glistened for a few moments as it soaked in and then was a wet patch. I was stunned and puzzled, and started looking for explanations. The hot water bottle was at the far end of the bed and the puddle was half way down the bed on my side, so that did not account for it. I looked up at the ceiling, wondering if the water had come from there just as I pulled the duvet back. Unlikely that I would have missed it falling, but anyway the ceiling was dry and there was no hole or sagging in the ceiling. I touched the puddle and it felt wet. The fluid had no smell or taste. Yes, I licked my finger, as my mind running out of explanations wondered if our young son had toddled into the room, peed and left although, again, that in no way could account for what I saw. Finally I thought to look at the underside of the duvet and found that there was a wet patch. But on investigation, although the cover was wet, the inner was not. I could only conclude that the puddle had formed in the moment I threw the duvet back – which defied all logic.

I went and got my wife as a witness to what I was seeing and, while I was fascinated by the event, she was very scared. It happened once again to me some days later and once about a week later to my wife when she went to bed on her own. When I came home I found her huddled on a chair downstairs still shaking with the shock.

Over the years I have wondered many times about these events and discovered that this is supposed to have happened to other people. I would cite Matthew Manning for one. I do not subscribe to religious, God-inspired miracles, but have no doubt as to the reality of the phenomenon I witnessed. Also, nothing psychic has ever happened to me before or since. So I can only conclude that in certain circumstances the accepted laws of physics change when human consciousness interacts in rare and unusual ways with the material world. I would love to think that this suggests that human consciousness can survive the disintegration of the containing body, but there is no logical reason to assume this.

Tony Faulkner
By email

Menacing room

When I was a young kid, I remember waking up at night and seeing a woman looking out the window, crying and bathed in purplish

light. I addressed the figure and it told me to go back to sleep. In the morning, I asked my mother why she was at the window the previous night crying, but she denied doing so. Also, frequently at night I would feel the presence of someone sleeping in bed beside me even though I could never see anybody there.

Visiting a friend's house, I was with the family sitting in the kitchen when we all heard three distinct knocks on the front door. Everyone but me jumped up and rushed to the door, but nobody was there. I was later told by the family that they constantly heard knocks on the front door over many years. They assumed it was some prankster who ran away and was never caught. How common are phantom door knockers or are they no more than a very persistent nuisance neighbourhood prankster or some mischievous poltergeist whose capabilities are limited to occasionally knocking on front doors?

While I was sitting in a library cubicle not so long ago suddenly a pile of books dropped down from above onto the desk. I stood up thinking it was some prankster, but found no one else nearby or sitting in the other cubicles. Furthermore, the books fell in a pile not haphazardly as if they had been thrown. I sat down and continued reading but within minutes, it happened again. Again finding nobody else nearby, I beat a hasty retreat from the library.

Another time, I was in the city having lunch when suddenly pencils began raining down from the sky several at a time. Thinking it was some prankster throwing things from the top of the nearby building, I rang the police to apprehend the prankster in case he might actually injure some other passer-by. The police spoke to me afterwards and were rather miffed that I had sent them on a wild goose chase.

More recently, after floodwaters had inundated Ipswich (Australia), coming up to the bottom of the hill where I lived at the time, and subsequently receded, I was walking to the nearby train station about 4.30am one morning, when a spray of pebbles hit the road ahead of me. Thinking it to be some pranksters in the nearby park throwing projectiles to give me a scare, I looked around, but couldn't see or hear anyone in the gloom. As I

"I awoke and could see a swirling of what looked like brown smoke"

continued walking, rocks began to fall upon the rooves of nearby houses as I passed by them, increasing in size judging by the increasingly louder sounds they were making. Eventually, I took off running scared not only by the increasing cacophony but by the thought that the homeowners might think that it was me, rather than some unseen prankster throwing stones at their houses.

Lastly, I moved into a unit and all was well for a year or so when overnight my spare room for no apparent reason took on a menacing, frightening, foreboding feeling to it whenever you entered it at night or even when you walked past the door, so much so, that at night I would keep the door shut and hurry past it. My Muslim neighbour suggested that a djinni must have taken up residence in the spare room, apparently a habitual practice of theirs, and it reminded me of the Doctor Who (Matt Smith) episode "The Eleventh Hour" wherein Amy pretended a room in her house did not exist because it was unknowingly occupied by the shapeshifting alien Prisoner Zero. I wonder how commonly homeless djinn or other entities take up residence in spare rooms, if indeed that was the scenario, and what remedies other sufferers employed to rectify the situation?

David Keyworth
Tinana, Australia

Brown smoke

In December 2013 my Dad was dying of terminal cancer. Eventually he was moved from hospital to an end-of-life nursing home. I had been at his bedside most of the day and my partner at the time arrived to relieve me, so I could get some sleep at home.

I awoke in the middle of the night and could see a swirling of what looked like brown smoke on the ceiling above my head. I looked at the bedside clock and it was exactly 3am. I looked over to the window to see if I'd left the window open, but I hadn't. I watched this in a semi-conscious state of confusion for a while and then dropped back off to sleep.

The following morning I drove to the hospital, where my partner had stayed the night. When I enquired how Dad had been overnight, she told me that he had died during the night, but the nursing staff had managed to revive him. I was of course shocked to hear this, and even more shocked when she said this had happened at 3am. (It made me think that perhaps he had come to visit me to say goodbye...)

Dad finally died a couple of days later. My brother and I shared a glass of Guinness with him as he passed away. Here, my brother takes up the story: "Then a doctor came into the room and we got up to follow him. As we were walking out of the room I was aware of a feeling that the floor below me was lifting like a wave about to break on the shore – it was like a strong burst of energy that then dissipated out of the room. I felt it physically. Evidently, no one else did. I didn't mention it at the time to anyone, but filed it away in my head for later consideration".

Stuart Minal
Acocks Green, Birmingham

Running companion

The following took place perhaps 15 years ago when I was running through some ancient woodlands very near to my home. The woods are criss-crossed by streams and each area has quite a different atmosphere.

One day, as I was running, I very clearly heard someone running behind me. I was by no means a fast runner, so I moved over to let the other runner past, only to find there was no one there. At the same time, I felt, very definitely, that I was not alone but that I was nevertheless most welcome. I ran on, accompanied by my mystery companion whom I continued to hear. This happened on several future runs, but each time a dog came into view and my mystery companion would leave me.

I fully accept that this was a subjective experience which is not open to a rational or objective evaluation. I tried 'talking' to my invisible companion, who seemed to assure me that I was welcome and that they only disappeared when dogs appeared so as not to disturb them. This may well be pure fantasy on my part – but at a deep level I feel my mystery companion was a *genius loci* or dryad of deep age and great benevolence.

Huw Pritchard BA MLitt FCA FRSA

Fortean Traveller

143. The Wizard of Dungeness

RUTH CLYDESDALE visits Prospect Cottage, the home of the late film-maker, writer and gardener Derek Jarman, and finds magic and mystery among the shingle...

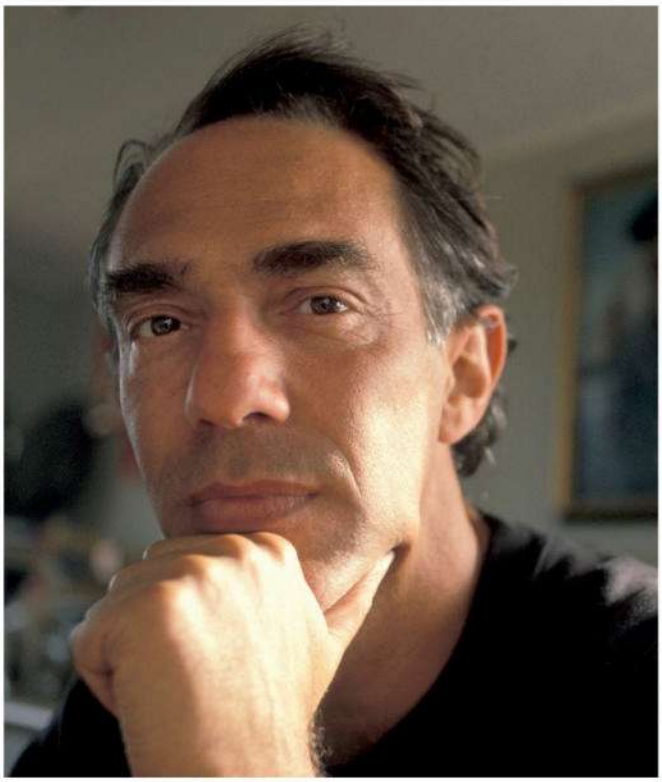
Twice now, my partner and I have visited Derek Jarman's Dungeness home, Prospect Cottage. The visits made powerful impressions on us both. The cottage, bought thanks to a successful crowdfunding campaign, has only been open to the public since 2023.

Derek Jarman (1942-1994) was a modern Renaissance man. He is perhaps most famous as a director of experimental, art-house films and as a Turner Prize-nominated artist, but he was also a theatrical designer, a writer and an innovative gardener. He campaigned fearlessly for gay rights at a period when the UK Government was legislating to limit them and was boldly 'out' himself. Tragically, he contracted AIDS when doing so was a death sentence.

Driving through Kent in the spring of 1986 in search of a film location, Jarman stopped off for fish and chips in Dungeness – itself a weird and wonderful place, oddly reflecting Jarman's outsider status. Dungeness is sometimes described as the UK's only desert, a shingle headland backed by the Romney Marsh. It has the eerie feel of a place cut off, remote, lost in time. The weather can be extreme, and yet it is a wildlife haven supporting over 600 kinds of plants, as well as many rare invertebrates. A handful of old fishermen's cottages is sprinkled across the shingle, with a vast nuclear power station looming incongruously over them. The atmosphere is, as many have noted, unique and otherworldly.

Here Jarman spotted and fell in love with Prospect Cottage. His partner Keith Collins recalled: "As we neared the cottage… we saw the green-and-white 'For Sale' sign – the improbability of it made the purchase inescapable." For the rest of his life, Jarman split his time between the cottage and his London flat. It was in December 1986 that he received the devastating diagnosis of AIDS, and the remote cottage became a refuge for him. Artistic residencies are now available at the cottage; but be warned – we were told that the bleak beachscape and eerie atmosphere is too much for some people. However it seems that Dungeness suited Jarman (literally) down to the ground, for here he established his famous garden.

Jarman was hardly the kind of inhabitant that the locals were used to, and they accommodated him by inventing an identity that satisfied them. His habit of gardening in a North African



TOP: Prospect Cottage. **LEFT:** Derek Jarman in the cottage, 1988.

POLIPHILO / CREATIVE COMMONS

JOHN COLE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

robe and his enthusiasm for beach-combing hag stones (holed flints) and random pieces of driftwood and iron – many of which became totem-like sculptures in his garden – soon earned him the identity of a wizard. But he was well liked, so it was decided that he had moved in to work white magic against the nuclear power station. By chance or otherwise, this labelling was not without foundation.

"At first, people thought I was building a garden for magical purposes – a white witch out to get the nuclear power station. It did have magic – the magic of surprise, the treasure hunt…"

Now that Prospect Cottage is open to the public, the visitor can revel in its unique atmosphere. Stepping over the threshold I was hit with the impression of entering another world that was confirmed as we were led through the rooms. Much of the furniture is massively crafted from wood by a friend of Jarman who was not trained as a carpenter. The walls are hung with Jarman's own art as well as photos and some pieces by friends. On flat surfaces, crucifixes from junk shops lie by bowls of pebbles and dried herbs. Wave-smoothed wooden staffs from the beach are propped up in the corners, festooned with many long strings of hag stones. In one corner are Jarman's gardening tools. Everything has an air of mystery, of perhaps having some magical use or purpose. And kept safely behind glass is Jarman's library, which includes many works on alchemy, magic, myth and Jungian psychology.

Was Jarman really practising magic in his remote retreat? In his journals, he makes no mention of performing magical rituals, but if we look at some of his creative work – his films, and the garden he created at Prospect Cottage – we might be able to gather some clues.

Jarman's films are highly experimental. For some, he used Super 8mm film, which gives a grainy effect to images that is suggestive of some other time or sphere of reality. One of these films is *In the Shadow of the Sun*, which consists of several short films shot between 1972 and 1975 and spliced together to create an unsettling depiction of a fiery apocalypse. The title comes from a 17th century alchemical text and refers to the philosopher's stone, but the original title was 'English Apocalypse', and that is what is presented to the viewer in a dream-like fashion. Images of apparent human sacrifices in the midst of squares and circles of fire are cut with someone repeatedly tracing out a ritual circle, as well as hands shuffling Tarot cards (taken from a short 1972 film called *Tarot* or *The Magician*), and ritual dancing. There are masks, robes, and ruins giving an impression that this is indeed a vision of black magic, demons and Hell itself.

Hardly less alarming to view is Jarman's cult classic *Jubilee*, made in 1978 in the wake of Elizabeth II's Silver Jubilee. Often labelled as a punk film, it contrasts the imagined world of Elizabeth I with a violent and extreme view of Britain (principally London) in anarchic decay. The plot has John Dee, the notorious Elizabethan astrologer, alchemist and magician, magically commanding the spirit Ariel to whisk Elizabeth I forward in time into the reign of her namesake. Jarman identified with Dee, perhaps because both were in their different ways unconventional characters who suffered for being different – or because Jarman too was practising a kind of magic. At the end of a series of violent events including the murder of Elizabeth II, the trio of Dee, Elizabeth and Ariel return to the relative calm and peace of their own time.

Ariel is, of course, a character from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, a play that Jarman adapted for film in 1979. Like the play, the film is soaked in magic created by Prospero. Jarman subscribed to the widely accepted view that Prospero is based on Dee, adding a third level of interpretation since he himself, as mentioned above, identified with Dee. Perhaps his film can be seen as a magnificent fantasy of enjoying unshakeable power, in contrast to the artistic struggles and ambiguous position in society that Jarman experienced. It can also be read as a reflection on the enchantment of film, or of any art form. If so, it squarely places the artist as magician, someone who employs subtle means to alter and perhaps elevate the state of consciousness of those who view or hear (or participate in) the artwork. As an aside, it might be noted that actors playing in Shakespeare have remarked that doing so improves their health and mental wellbeing.

There is much more that could be said about the films,

KAREN ROE / CREATIVE COMMONS

ABOVE: Driftwood, rusted metal and wild plants in the garden of Prospect Cottage. **BELOW:** Derek Jarman creating the garden in 1988. The looming structures of Dungeness power station are visible in the background.

Was Jarman practising magic in his remote retreat?

JOHN COLE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

JOHN COLE / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

ABOVE: Derek Jarman with Dungeness power station behind him; did he work his magic on it?

but let's now look at the garden of Prospect Cottage. This has been a place of pilgrimage for Jarman fans ever since he died – so much so that Keith Collins, who continued to live there for another couple of decades, put up a sign requesting people to treat the place with respect and not to peer through the windows. As the cottage is on the beach, surrounded by shingle, it appears to be a highly unsuitable place to plant anything other than the tough plants that thrive at Dungeness: sea kale, ragwort, valerian and other wild plants more usually considered to be weeds. But Jarman had been passionate about gardening since childhood. Some of his garden tools date back to that time, and his appreciative care of them perhaps accounts for the air of ritual, mystical use I felt when encountering them in the cottage.

At first, even Jarman thought it would be impossible to make a garden. However, he planted a dog rose and began collecting interesting flints and driftwood from the beach, using driftwood with a string of hag stones to stake the rose. From there, he simply carried on, regarding the work as therapeutic. Friends helped with the heavy work and he learned to live with the heartbreak of plants destroyed by storms and salt-laden east winds. He laid out beds within circles of flint and pebbles, specifically evoking ancient stone circles and remarking: "…they have the same mysterious power to attract."

"I invest my stones with the power of those at Avebury. I have read all the mystical books about ley-lines and circles – I built the circles with this behind my mind… There was magic and hard work in finding the coloured stones for the front..."

Reader, I confess that I took a pebble from the shingle in the front garden. Picked up at random, it has its own magic, being like a smooth animal skull that fits to my fingers. I am not repentant, as the sea constantly renews the supply.

The garden is embellished by many pieces of driftwood and metal scavenged from the beach. They stand like abstract sculptures or totem poles, arranged with an artist's eye. There is no fence around the garden (which adds to its air of mystery), so it is available for visits at any time. Today it is maintained, but there has been no attempt to preserve it as Jarman left it, on the principle that it is alive and therefore constantly changing. As in Keith Collins's day, visitors are asked to treat it with respect and not to pick or damage the plants; it is used for teaching horticulture.

If the garden has magic, the interior of the cottage is super-charged with it. I got gooseflesh as I stepped over the threshold. Lovingly maintained by Keith as a shrine to Jarman until his own untimely death in 2018, the cottage feels as if imbued by the filmmaker's living spirit. Keith's own books are concealed behind frosted glass, and one of our guides pointed at a low cupboard, remarking, "Keith's TV is in there." Almost everything you see has been made, chosen or placed by Jarman. I have already given some idea of what you can see there, but must add that the views from each window complement the interior. The garden outside extends the impression of a deliberately magical, ritual space, surrounded by and blending with the powerful, untamed enchantment of the marshes, the beach and the sea, all illuminated by vast skies and spectacular sunsets. All this contrasts with the huge towers of the power station, which loom in an undeniably threatening fashion over the tiny cottages and one-storey pub.

Jarman found the power station mesmerising.

The nuclear power station is a wonderment. At night it looks like a great liner or a small Manhattan ablaze with a thousand lights of different colours. A mysterious shadow surrounds it that makes it possible for the stars still to glow in a clear summer sky.

Hard as I tried, I was unable to conjure up this daytime phenomenon. In his diaries, Jarman records the terrifying night he and a visiting friend thought the power station was exploding. It turned out that they had been watching a violent storm, but their fears expressed the profound anxiety of living in the shadow of such a dangerous neighbour. Maybe Jarman's garden really was, even if unconsciously, meant as a charm against the dark power.

Not for a moment do I think that Jarman practised magic in any organised or deliberate way. However, the impression I gathered from his cottage and garden was of a person with a great deal of natural, inborn power. Dungeness also has its own uncanny power, upon which Jarman could (and I believe did) draw. I think all this was unconscious, although I may be wrong. I should add too that Jarman inspired much love in his friends and colleagues that has continued since his death among fans (including myself) who were never fortunate enough to have met him. Somehow he inspires affection as only someone on the side of the angels can. Any enchantment he created could only be positive.

My feeling is that Jarman did indeed somehow perform magic upon the power station – and that it worked. Slowly, it's true, but that is hardly surprising given the situation: one dying man against two nuclear reactors. Jarman died in 1994. In December 2006, Dungeness A stopped generating power. In 2009, problems were discovered with Dungeness B and it was temporarily shut down. In 2018, a scheduled maintenance shutdown took place, and in 2021, the second reactor was closed for good. The site of both reactors is now undergoing the lengthy process of decommissioning and decontamination, which is expected to be complete towards the end of the century. I met a man who claims that the fish he catches off Dungeness are larger than normal because the water is warmed by nuclear waste. And yes, he eats them. "I glow in the dark!" he joked.

Our guides around the cottage told us that some visitors love the place so much they return four or five times. If I lived nearer, I too would go frequently to soak up the atmosphere. The place, Jarman and his story are all unique, and the eerie atmosphere of the marshes, huge beach and sea can be strangely appealing, almost mesmerising. Do visit if you can, but please note that advance booking is essential. And if you go for fish and chips at the Pilot Inn, don't forget to raise a glass to Derek Jarman, the white wizard of Dungeness.

Quotations are taken from *Derek Jarman's Garden* (Thames and Hudson, 1995)

RUTH CLYDESDALE writes about esoteric themes in art and literature, the history of magic and contemporary witchcraft practices. She is the author of several books including *Secret Wisdom* (Arcturus, 2009) and *Magic and Witchcraft: An Illustrated History* (Arcturus, 2021).

PECULIAR POSTCARDS

JAN BONDESON shares another deltiological discovery from his prodigious collection of postcards. This month's pictorial blast from the past is a unique record of the once common custom of using dogs to nurse orphaned fox cubs

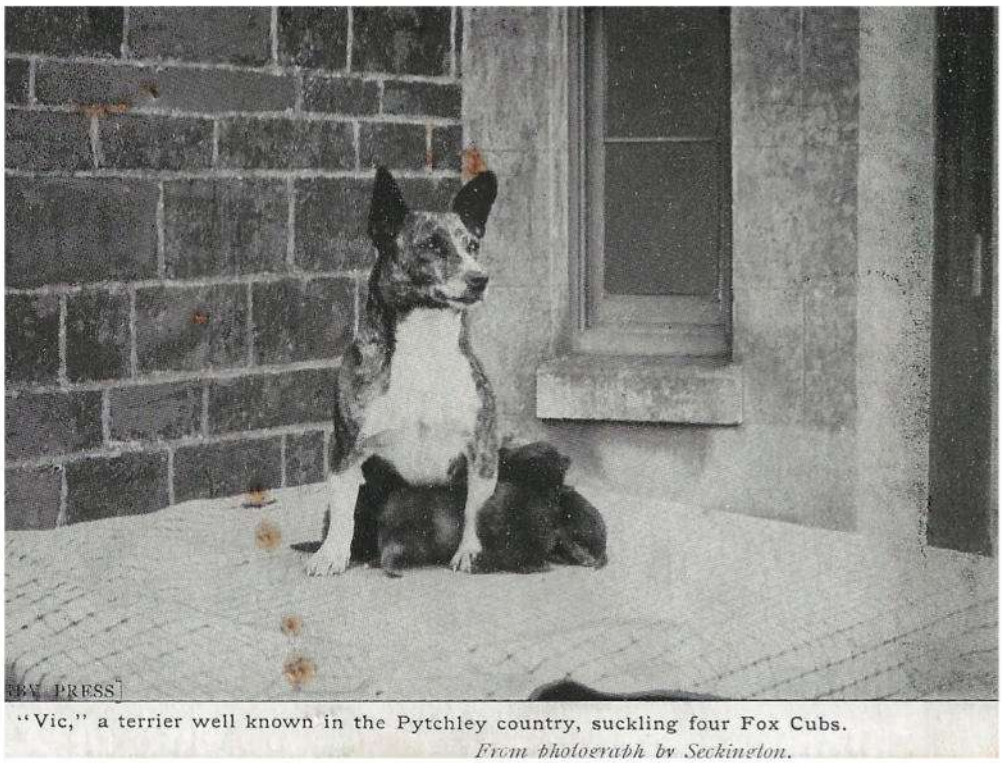
47. VIC THE DOG AND HER FOX CUBS

The postcard reproduced here shows a terrier called Vic, said to have been well known in Pytchley, Northamptonshire, and its surroundings, suckling four fox cubs. Most dogs (or humans) addressed as 'Vic' are of the male sex, but this could hardly be true in the present case; perhaps Vic was short for 'Victoria'?

This 1906 postcard, from a photograph of the curious Northamptonshire canine taken by the Seckington studio for the *Rugby Press*, is indeed a most remarkable sight. Vic's purported local fame did not make her a newspaper celebrity, and online sources provide no source as to the identity of her owner, or to the ultimate fate of either Vic herself or the fox cubs she had helped to nourish.

It remains a fact that in Victorian and Edwardian times, fox cubs were regularly put out to nurse with either cats or dogs. The reason for this perversion of nature was that when a vixen had been killed by the foxhunters, the huntsmen and their servants made a search of the nearby area looking for her cubs, sometimes finding them. Thinking it 'not cricket' to allow the defenceless little creatures to starve to death, they rescued the fox cubs and employed a dog or cat to suckle them.

An early example of this practice was described in the *Falmouth Express* of 1838. After a huntsman had discovered five fox cubs, whose mother had been killed by the hunt, they were taken to the house of General Wyndham, of Sladeland, where they were put in a basket with a terrier bitch, who suckled them and



ABOE: Vic the Pytchley dog with her four young 'children', a postcard stamped and posted in 1906.

seemed "as fond and careful as if they were her own progeny". In 1881, a sheepdog suckled one fox cub along with her own pups; in 1887, a cat suckled three fox cubs without objecting.

In 1895, two young fox cubs came into the possession of Mr Thomas Sharpe, gamekeeper of Wiscombe Park near Colyton. He put them in a basket with his Irish terrier bitch and her four puppies, and they were soon large and fierce enough to catch small rabbits that were brought to them by the keeper's sons. *The Taunton Courier* commented that "It is a well-known fact that fox cubs are exceedingly quarrelsome; these two little fellows pitch into the terrier puppies, handling them so roughly at times that Mr Sharpe thinks he will have to part them before long." There are several newspaper reports of cats suckling fox cubs, one of them as late as 1927.

In Victorian and Edwardian times, fox cubs were often put out to nurse with cats and dogs

In 1901, Sanger's Menagerie in Margate had a novel attraction for the curious: a litter of three one-month-old lion cubs were suckled by an Irish Terrier bitch, who seemed to take a great deal of pride in her large 'puppies'. The little lions had been given a foster mother since the lioness did not produce milk and had killed her cubs in the past.

In the present time, there are some instances of rare tiger or lion cubs being suckled by large dogs after their mothers had rejected them, although the old habit of putting orphan fox cubs to be suckled by dogs or cats has long since been discarded and forgotten. The postcard of the Pytchley dog Vic suckling four fox cubs would appear to be the sole surviving pictorial evidence of this curious old custom.

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FORTEAN TIMES is a monthly magazine of news, reviews and research on strange phenomena and experiences, curiosities, prodigies and portents. It was founded by Bob Rickard in 1973 to continue the work of Charles Fort (1874–1932).

Born of Dutch stock in Albany, New York, Fort spent many years researching scientific literature in the New York Public Library and the British Museum Library. He marshalled his evidence and set forth his philosophy in *The Book of the Damned* (1919), *New Lands* (1923), *Lo!* (1931), and *Wild Talents* (1932).

He was sceptical of dogmatic scientific explanations, observing that some scientists tended to argue according to their personal beliefs rather than the rules of evidence and that inconvenient data were ignored, suppressed, discredited or explained away. He criticised modern science for its reductionism, its attempts to define, divide and separate. Fort's dictum "One measures a circle beginning anywhere" expresses instead his philosophy of Continuity in which everything is in an intermediate and transient state between extremes.

He had ideas of the Universe-as-organism and the transient nature of all apparent phenomena, coined the term 'teleportation', and was perhaps the first to speculate that mysterious lights seen in the sky might be craft from outer space. However, he cut at the very roots of credulity: "I conceive of nothing, in religion, science or philosophy, that is more than the proper thing to wear, for a while."

Fort was by no means the first person to collect anomalies and oddities – such collections have abounded from Greece to China since ancient times. **Fortean Times** keeps alive this ancient task of dispassionate weird-watching, exploring the wild frontiers between the known and the unknown.

Besides being a journal of record, **FT** is also a forum for the discussion of observations and ideas, however absurd or unpopular, and maintains a position of benevolent scepticism towards both the orthodox and unorthodox. **FT** toes no party line.

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PHENOMENOMIX

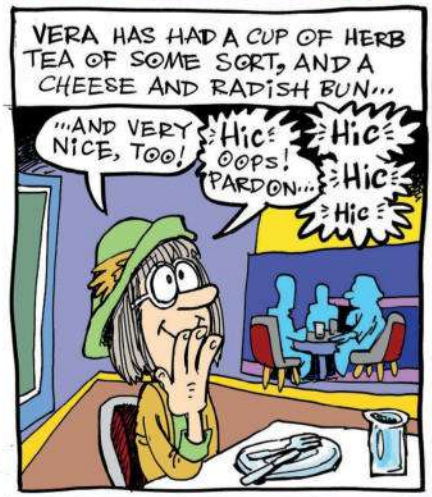
Mme. ASTRALOOZI—"AUX FANTÔMES"

HUNT EMERSON

VERA! I'VE GOT AN IMPORTANT CLIENT CALLING THIS AFTERNOON... SHE'S THE PROPRIETOR OF "AUX FANTÔMES", THE POSH PARANORMAL RESTAURANT IN TOWN!
AND I WANT YOU OUT OF THE WAY!
I WANT TO IMPRESS HER WITH THE SHEER AMAZINGNESS OF MY MYSTIC POWERS, AND I DON'T WANT YOU CONFUSING THINGS AND MESSING IT UP!
SO HERE'S £20, VERA – TAKE YOURSELF TO LUNCH!
ARE YOU SURE, MRS. A?
GO!
OK! TUM-TE TUM...

MADAME ASTRALOOZI WELCOMES HER GUEST...
AAH! Mme. GRIGNOTEUSE! PLEASE-ENTER MY SALON OF MYSTERY! JUST AS YOU, AT "AUX FANTÔMES" ARE EMPRESS OF THE MYSTICAL MENU, SO AM I QUEEN OF SPIRIT CONTACTS!
WELL I HOPE SO! I EXPECT SOMETHING SPECTACULAR! I HOPE YOU'RE NOT WASTING MY TIME!
HAUNTED
HOUSE

MEANWHILE...
OOOO! THAT'S THE POSH RESTAURANT! AND THEY'VE OPENED A LITTLE SNACK BAR! I'LL HAVE A CUP OF TEA...
AUX FANTÔMES
AUX FANTÔM
LE PETIT SPOOK
CAFÉ



COMING NEXT MONTH

WEIRDNESS WAY OUT WEST

ON THE TRAIL WITH THE PARANORMAL RANGERS

THE WYVERNS OF WAVERLEY ABBEY

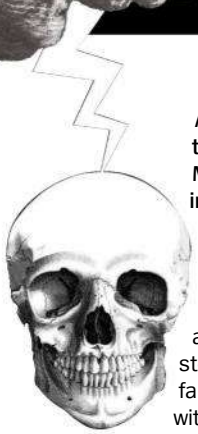
MODERN-DAY DRAGON SIGHTINGS

IN SEARCH OF LORD LUCAN, THE HAUNTED BEDSTEAD, ALIEN EMAILS, AND MUCH MORE...

FORTEAN TIMES 451
ON SALE 31 OCT 2024

STRANGE DEATHS

UNUSUAL WAYS OF SHUFFLING OFF THIS MORTAL COIL



When six guests at the Grand Hyatt Erawan hotel in Bangkok, Thailand, failed to check out on time, staff went to their rooms to investigate. They found all six guests dead in the room booked by Sherine Chong, 56, with a meal untouched on the table. The victims were Chong, plus Dang Hung Van, 55, Thi Nguyen Phuong, 46, Hong Pham Thanh, 49, Thi Nguyen Phuong Lan, 47, and Dinh Tran Phu, 37, all of Vietnamese descent. Police believed they had died about 24 hours before their discovery. There were no bruises or injuries on the bodies and no sign of a struggle, but all the victims had apparently died in agony, foaming at the mouth. According to Dr Kornkiat Vongpaisarnsin, a forensic scientist who examined the corpses, "'The victims' lips and nails had turned dark purple, indicating a lack of oxygen, while their internal organs exhibited a blood red appearance." He said that this was "a characteristic sign of cyanide poisoning." It is believed that the group had gathered to discuss a failed investment in a construction project that had left Chong owing ten million baht (£215,000) to Van and Phong, which she was unable to pay. When the waiter delivered the meal to Chong's room, she was the only person present, and he recalled that she "spoke very little and was visibly under stress". He offered to pour the tea for her, but she refused, saying she would do it herself. Investigators found partly drunk cups of tea in the room alongside the untouched meal, as well as two metal canisters that did not belong to the hotel that they believe contained the cyanide. The corpses were scattered about the suite, with some still at the table, others in the bathroom and two apparently attempting the reach the door when they died. Police discounted mass suicide and concluded that Chong had spiked the tea with the cyanide, killing herself and everyone else in the room. *lbc.co.uk, 17 Jul; dailymail.com, 18 Jul 2024.*

Police called to an incident at a Fourth of July party in Summerville, near Charleston, South Carolina, found 41-year-old Allen Ray McGrew lying in the road. His wife explained that McGrew had "ignited a large firework device", then put it on his head, "possibly to show off". According to the police report, "She was trying to tell Allen not to do that when the firework went off and she observed Allen collapse". According to the coroner, the explosion left McGrew with "massive head injuries", killing him instantly. ***firehouse.com, 8 Jul 2024*.

Teenager Olivia Bright, 17, from East Toledo, Ohio, died from apparent electrocution while stepping into a caravan outside her family home in bare feet. Found with burns on her right hand and in cardiac arrest, she was taken to hospital but was pronounced dead on arrival. Firefighters attending the scene blamed Bright's death on faulty wiring and a recent storm that had resulted in the yard being filled with electrically live puddles. However, investigation by Toledo Edison, the local power company, could not find any electrical faults, and there was no charring on the door of the caravan where she had touched it, which would have been expected from the burns on her hand. The caravan was also not connected to the mains and was sitting on its tyres, so should not have formed a circuit to earth when Bright touched it. Meanwhile, in Brazil, singer Ayres Sasaki died of electrocution during a performance at a hotel when he reached out to hug a soaking wet fan in the audience while holding a live electric guitar. *dailymail.co.uk, 20 Aug; Sun, 22 Jul 2024*.

Neighbours of a 49-year-old Thai man named Narin rushed round to see what was happening when his wife Phattara was heard screaming that she could not breathe during a heated argument between the two of them. Finding Narin outside their home cutting off his wife's head with a meat cleaver, they fled and called police. Officers arrived to find Phattara's headless body in the street and later recovered her head from a nearby chicken coop. Arrested, Narin admitted drinking and taking a form of amphetamine known as Yabba, and to beheading his wife. He explained that she had been taken over by a ghost called Phee Ka, an entity known locally for possessing humans and eating raw meat, and he was attempting to drive it out as he feared that the ghost might have attacked him if he hadn't taken action. He apologised to their son for killing Phattara while doing so, and said he loved his wife and wished he could apologise to her too, regretting that he was now unable to do so. ***thethaiger.com, 30 July 2024*.**

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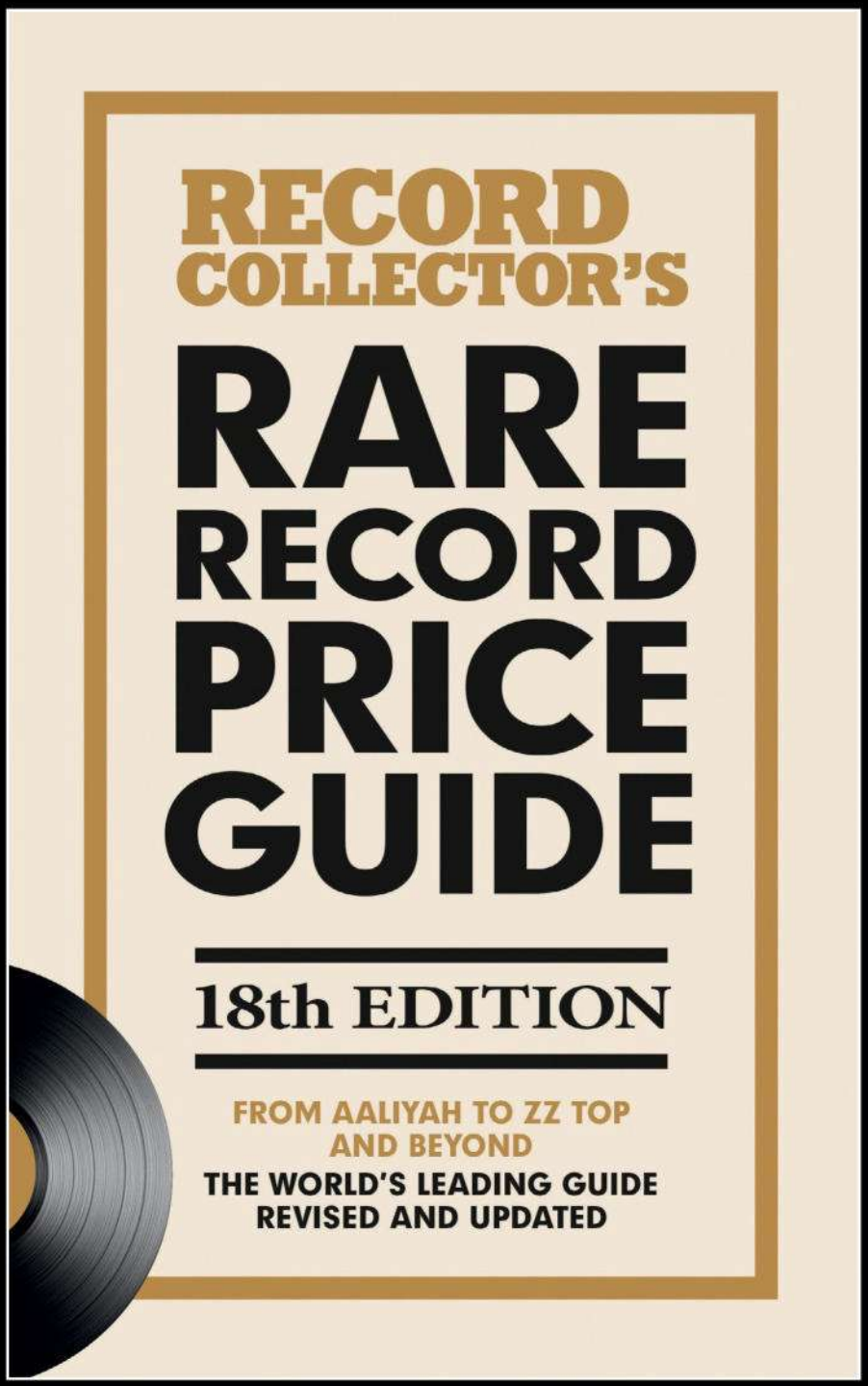

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